

Watching Her Fall In Love by Hatter23

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Summary: Hopper knew that taking in El and keeping her safe for the past year meant that at some point, the boy she had been begging to see, Mike, would someday be in the picture as well. What Hopper didn't realize was the fact that in taking in a telekinetic teenage daughter, who was in love, was a lot more than what he was bargaining for. Cute Mileven fluff and Hopper being protective.

1. The Gate is Closed (Hopper)

Okay, I thought this would be kind of a fun story to try out. Jim having to watch his daughter be in love. And in retrospect, Hopper had to have known that the second Mike and El were reunited that there wasn't going to be any way that they would be kept apart. So, why not give his perspective on watching their relationship grow, and him having to raise a teenage daughter with a boyfriend.

Also, I really enjoy writing Mileven moments, so I think I will switch back and forth between Jim's perspective on a scene, and then move to Mike and Eleven's perspective as well between chapter's. So, kind of like Chapter 1: Hopper's Perspective and Chapter 1.2: Mike and Eleven's Perspective.

This will also be an aging story as well, watching El and Mike's love blossom over the years. Which, I think will also be easier for me to get chapter's out because they can be seen as separate on shots as well.

So here we go!

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Hopper's Perspective:

Hopper honestly didn't realize, or *fully* realize that the moment his new daughter had reunited with the boy she had been pining after for months would be the trigger for his 'protective father mode', no, he didn't know that at all.

He had only been a father to a little girl once. He never got the experience to see his little girl grow into a beautiful young lady. And with adopting El, he thought he might just get that chance again.

However, he never thought in his wildest dreams that he'd also be watching this young girl grow faster than ever before his eyes and

experience the world in a way he wasn't prepared for.

Hopper wasn't prepared for her first tantrum that lead to their home almost being destroyed. He needed to remember that this was a *telekinetic* hormonal teenager, not the typical teenage girl that probably just slammed doors. Instead Hopper got ten times that.

He also wasn't prepared for the young boy to start punching him after discovering his long lost love was still alive, and it was all *his* fault. Hopper didn't realize that the boys words would actually hit him harder than he liked to admit.

But, what he *really* wasn't prepared for was watching his little girl fall in love so quickly.

Hopper knew even before the adoption papers were signed, hell, he knew the second he took her in, protected her, that the Wheeler kid was going to be apart of *both* of their lives. He just didn't know how intently.

Hopper remembers the night that El closed the gate, the night he truly felt like a father again. The way she looked at him after she the gate was finally re-sealed, he could feel their connection tenfold, and he accepted that position with open arms.

He also remembers the way she walked into the Byer's home, he and everyone else ready to fight whatever what was coming their way. Only, for them all to get the shock of their life to see a young girl walk through the door.

And he will never forget the moment those two reunited, he had never seen either so happy or relieved to be together once again. And, he felt his heart break too, knowing deep down, that this wasn't something that was going to change.

Hopper honestly didn't want to accept it, what he saw between them, but he also knew that he would be able to control it to some extent...for awhile at least.

It was the moment he first felt his fatherly instincts kick in, and the beast growling in his stomach. He was lighting up one last cigarette before they were all heading off in different directions. He was waiting for El to get into the truck.

He picked his head up slightly, and turned towards the Byers home, and there he saw his punked out daughter standing close to the Wheeler boy. *Too close....*his fatherly instincts gnawed at his insides.

He watched the two, when suddenly, he was pretty sure he felt his heart stop, as he watched the girl lean in, stepping up on her tiptoes to get just a little closer to the Wheeler kid. Her head tilted upwards, and his bending down.

"El, time to go!" the words were out of his mouth before he could stop them, *not that he wanted to*, his new fatherly instincts wavered inside of him.

Hopper continued to watch the girl and boy together, as she whipped her head around to acknowledge his words. But, not before turning back to the boy and throwing her arms around him in a tight embrace. He's pretty sure his insides caught on fire at this interaction.

Even after the gate was closed, nothing would have prepared him for everything else that came with raising a teenage daughter, who was already deeply in love.

Hopper brought her back to the Byers, where even in and out of consciousness, all she could do was whisper his name, "Mike". And in his heart he knew he had to bring her back, show everyone that she was in fact, okay.

The moment his old police car pulled into the Byers driveway, there was movement coming out of the door. He couldn't see the figure, but he didn't need anyone to tell him exactly who this person was.

Her side door was thrown open before he had even placed the car in park as he shouted a "Hey!" to the figure. But, of course Hopper's words fell on deaf ears, as his daughter cried out a small, "Mike!", while the figure beside her called out her name, "El!"

She stumbled unceremoniously out of his cruiser and into the arms of the boy she had yearned to see. The boy she begged him to see. And now, they were wrapped up in each others arms, silently crying, letting out their year of frustration and sadness in one fell swoop.

Hopper watched in silence as his daughter seeked out the comfort of the other 'man' in her life.

"You're okay" the boy finally pulled away enough, sniffing, to let El have some air. She lets out a breathy laugh, "I promised", is all she says, before they are back in each other's embrace.

Exhaustion hits him like a wave, and he knows she is wiped as well, so he decides to break up the love fest. Hopper opens his door, closing it behind him, as he approaches the teens.

"Alright, come on you two, let's get cleaned up" his gruff voice just barely breaks them apart enough for them to turn to face him.

His daughter nods, her arms still wrapped around Wheeler's neck. And the boy fixes him with a steady stare that says, "*We aren't done here*" as Hopper fixes him with his own stare that says, "*No, no we aren't*".

Mike gently moves El, and before she can ask what he is doing, he bends down and swoops her into his arms. She lets out a small squeal as he does so, as she throws her arms around his neck for support.

One look at the kid and Hopper can tell he's just as exhausted as the rest of them. But, it seems with determination, he holds her steady, moving towards the house.

One foot inside the door and they are bombarded like a moth drawn to a flame, a million questions wash over them. Hopper's frustration level finally hits, "Okay, okay, she's fine, the gates closed, give her some space!" his booming voice echoes through the small house. And everyone finally backs off.

He watches as the Wheeler kid moves gingerly over to the couch, where he delicately lays his girl. And once she is settled, he is at her side. Their eyes searching the others, making sure they are actually

real, that they are both okay.

Hopper clears his throat, and now all eyes are on him, "The rest of you need to call your parents and let them know you're on your way home an-" but he's immediately cut off by a slew of unhappy voices.

"We can't go home now!", "They just got back!", "No one will care!", get thrown at him like a ton of bricks, and he settles himself slightly, taking in a breath before speaking.

"Kids" he starts, making sure he has all of their attentions. "It's late. Everyone's dirty, and tired. We *all* need rest, so that's what we're doing" he says trying to keep his composure.

The kids all fix him with steady eyes, but they all sigh in a silent agreement. "You can see her tomorrow" he finishes with, and this grabs their attention, bringing small smiles to their faces.

"Say your goodbyes, I'll take you all home" he says, and the kids move to say their goodbyes to El.

The redhead is last and she merely gives El a small nod, which she barely returns, and they move to wait on the porch. He notices Wheeler isn't moving.

Hopper lets out a long sigh, "Come on kid, time to-", "NO!", he is immediately cut off by the Wheeler's tired voice, the kids eyes glossy with unshed tears, but fierce with determination.

Hopper eyes the kid warily, but then looks at his daughter on the couch, her eyes are fighting the tiredness that seeps through her. Her small hand is wrapped tightly with the boys.

Her dark eyes move and catch his, and he can't help but soften slightly. He lets out a long sigh, as he runs a hand over his face. "Okay, fine kid, you can stay-" and at this the boy relaxes and lets out his own held breath as the girl softens as well.

"But, you both need to get cleaned up first, and you're sleeping on the floor", Jim says with a gruff firmness.

The boy nods at him, accepting his words. "Nancy's still here, she can

help El", the boy whispers to him.

Hopper silently nods, and turns to leave. He opens the door, but just before he shuts it, he casts a last glance through the small crack, watching their small interaction. The boy reaches forward and runs his long fingers through his daughters oddly slicked back hair. He watches as she melts into his embrace. His heart beat picks up, but he doesn't say anything as he closes the door.

Hopper drops off the rest of the kids, and when Dustin's curly hair disappears behind his front door, he finally lets out a long, exhausted breath.

He slumps forward in his seat, crossing his arms over his steering wheel, and resting his pounding, tired head against them. He dozes off momentarily, but jerks awake, realizing he has to get back to his girl.

His eyes catch the green glowing 1:35, that displays on his dashboard. Thinking *at least it's not too late*, to himself, but also wishing to be tucked away in his own bed.

Hopper revs his old engine to life and takes off for one more stop for the night.

He climbs the steps with heavy feet, and he slowly opens the door. As it creaks open, his eyes immediately fall on the couch, seeing that it is empty, he feels the panic begin to rise.

"She's in the shower, Nancy's helping her", a soft voice comes from around the corner. Hopper moves his eyes towards the kitchen, where a very tired and worn Joyce stands, an old robe cast loosely around her shoulders as she sips at a steaming coffee mug in her hand.

Hopper's shoulders relax at her words as he approaches the woman, as he moves his head in every other direction. The woman laughs at him, "He's just gotten out of the shower, he's getting dressed in Will's room" she explains to the new paranoid father.

He lets out a small cough, "Don't know what you mean" he tries to play off his search for Wheeler as if he was checking out the house, making sure everything is okay.

Joyce reaches out and places a gentle hand on Hopper's shoulder. His eyes meet hers, "He's a good kid, Hop, he won't hurt her".

He sighs, "Doesn't mean I can't be protective" he argues back, and she rolls her eyes. She moves away from him. "Coffee?" she quips at him, and he nods his head in thanks.

"She can sleep in Will's room, he's sleeping in my bed" she addresses Hopper as she pours him out a warm cup of coffee. She turns and hands it to him, he accepts it, and gives it a small sip.

"Hm, then Wheeler will be on the couch" he says with a set voice, and Joyce chuckles again. He throws her a questioning look. "Oh, Hop, you kept those two from each other for a *year*, give them a break, what do you think is going to happen?" she questions.

Hopper's eyes go wide, "You *know* what I think will happen", he strains. And Joyce only shakes her head. "Hop, they're fourteen! And they just missed each other! You really think Mike's going to put the moves on El the first night she's back!?" she half laugh, half stresses to the poor man.

Hopper grumbles, "It's just, she's my girl, don't need some *boy* groping at her".

Joyce actually lets out a long laugh at this, "*Mike*, groping Eleven!? Hop, seriously?"

He fixes her with a steely glare, "Don't push it Joyce" he growls. And before either of them can speak again, the door to Will's room opens, and Mike steps out in fresh sleepwear, his hair curling this way and that still damp from the shower.

Hopper catches his eyes and gives him a leveled look. This startles the boy slightly as he gingerly walks out into the kitchen, "Hey" he gives a small wave to the two adults.

Joyce gives him a warm smile as she stands, "How you feelin' Mike?"

she rubs at his shoulders, her hands following his movements as he shrugs.

"Just been a long day is all" he murmurs, and Joyce pulls him into a small side hug, "Well, we'll be off to bed soon, you'll all feel better after a good night's sleep" she tries.

Mike nods slowly, but they are all brought out of their moment, once they hear the bathroom door click open. Their eyes follow the sound and movement, as two figures step out.

Hopper's gaze holds onto his little girls as she steps out of the bathroom, steam and Nancy following behind her, she has on fresh clothing and a large sweatshirt that swims past her waist, as she holds her dark clothing to her chest.

Her eyes catch his, and she smiles, this in turn warms his heart, and he returns it in stride. However, their small moment is quickly broken, when she moves her head to the left, ever so slightly, and she sees Mike standing there, staring at her.

The kid approaches her slowly, mouth slightly open, his lip turned into a half smile. She follows his gaze, and Jim watches as her cheeks start to darken. He watches as her eyes shift back and forth, desperately trying to read Mike's facial expression.

"Wow, El.." the kid starts, and Hopper can sense El's immediate insecurity start to fill her, he begins to stand.

But, Mike reaches out a slow hand as he reaches behind El's head, playing with a small curl, the kids smile grows bigger, "I never expected you to have curly hair its-", but he doesn't get to finish as El's mouth turns upright and she finishes for him, "Pretty?" she finishes for him.

Mike's eyes meet hers, and they are beaming at one another, "The prettiest" he finishes, and she ducks her head in shyness, as both of their faces light up red.

Hopper silently grumbles to himself at their interaction, as they continue to stand in silence, just enjoying their moment together.

Nancy breaks the silence, as she places a gentle hand on El's shoulder. "She should be good, I helped her get that gunky makeup off her face, and the gel out of her hair" she gives the younger girl a small smile. El nods, "Yes, it was making my eyes itch" she states, rubbing her eyes and everyone around her lets out a light laugh.

Hopper moves towards the group of teens and his eyes meet El's, "Okay kid, it's time for you to get some rest, you'll take Will's room" he states gesturing to the door Mike had currently left open.

El merely nods at his statement, however, she doesn't move. Hopper gives her a curious look, "What's the matter kid?" he sighs.

El shrugs her shoulders, "Don't want to be alone" she whispers. Hopper scratches his beard, "I can sleep on the floor-" he starts, but is cut off by a shake of her head and she quickly whispers one word, "Mike".

Plain and simple, that's what she wants. And he feels his stomach tighten slightly at her statement. He quickly turns to the boy in question, who stands, fidgeting slightly at El's words, desperately trying to not meet his eyes.

He *really* doesn't want to deal with this right now, he's exhausted, his head is pounding, and he doesn't want to get into a talk with his girl about why boys and girls don't typically sleep in the same room together.

However, he assesses both the teens. He can see the bags and dark circles that lay beneath their heavy eyes. And he thinks back to Joyce's words, "*You kept them apart for a year, they just missed each other*".

And he finally lets out a long grumbling breath. "Alright. Fine. Wheeler can sleep in the room with you-" and at this both young teens turn to smile at one another, "But" he quips, and both teens' attentions are back on him, "Wheeler is on the floor, and the door stays open" he says levelly.

Wheeler gives him a tight stare, but El sighs softly and nods her head and whispers, "Compromise". And he can't help but allow a small

smile to pull itself onto his face, feeling slightly proud of his girl.

He walks over to her, she bends her neck back to look him in the eyes, hers wide and searching as he places a hand on her head, ruffling her still wet curls, "Good word, kid" he mutters, and she beams at him.

The teens get settled in Will's room, El tucked up under Will's comforter, and Mike wrapped up in the sleeping bag that still laid there from his previous night sleeping over.

Hopper looks down at his girl, her eyes are fighting sleep, so he bends over and keeps it quick, "I'm so proud of you, kid" he slowly moves his hand and passes it through her hair. Her eyes close at the contact, "Thank you, Hop", is all she says, as she keeps her eyes shut.

He smiles lightly and stands to leave, he can see Wheeler peeking up at him slightly, he points a finger at him, "No funny business, Wheeler" he whispers to to him, giving him a tight stare. The kid doesn't say anything, but nods his head along with a slight eye roll, as he turns in his sleeping bag, back facing him.

Hopper sighs at the sight as he turns to move the door slightly closed, but also ajar, so he knows nothing will happen between them. He lets out another long breath, and makes his way over towards the couch, where Joyce has left a pillow and blanket, he greedily lays down, and he's pretty sure he's out before his head hits the pillow.

He is startled awake by a nightmare as he shoots up from his resting position on the couch. He can feel the cold sweat sticking to him as he tries to calm his breathing and rapid heart beat.

He moves forward slightly rubbing both of his hands through his face, attempting to remind himself that it was just a dream, and El is okay.

Another breath escapes him, as he moves to stand. He can see out the window only a couple hours have passed, as the moon still glows as the only light. Hopper can't help himself by standing and moving

towards Will's room, just to check and make sure she's okay.

He's prepared to see Wheeler and El sleeping in the same room. What he's not prepared for is the fact that Mike has moved so that he is on the bed with El. He can just barely make out that El is curled up under the sheets, while Mike remains on top. He can feel the monster inside him become agitated.

In his protective father's mind, he has every right to go in and separate the two from each other. However, the rational part of his brain takes another look at the scene. They are both curled up on their sides facing one another. Mike's arm is draped loosely around her midsection, while El's hands are curled up into his shirt. Their breathing is soft, and even.

They're just sleeping, his rational mind reminds him. He moves to rest half of his body against the doorframe, watching the two teens sleep peacefully.

He is quickly reminded that this is probably one of the quietest she has been since taking her in. For, he can't count the amount of times she had awoken him from a dead sleep screaming, crying or having a 'night episode'.

But, seeing her sleeping so serenely stops him from making any rash movements or decisions. He knew, that taking her in meant that Wheeler was probably going to be apart of that deal as well. He just wasn't prepared for this at all. Knowing his little girl was in love, and now that she had been reunited with that love, she wasn't going to let him go.

Okay, soooo, what did you guys think? I really like the Hopper and El, father/daughter relationship and I can't wait to see how it changes in season 3, especially since Mike and El will be dating!

And as I said in the beginning, the next chapter will be Mike and El's take on this current scene, and I will flip between them and Hopper with each scene I choose to write on. Because I can't help but write some good Mileven fluff as well!

Also, I'm still writing Stranger Tides, so please don't worry! Just had this floating around and needed to get it out there, and see what people's opinions are on this! And with this story it gives me more leeway where each chapter is almost like a one shot, so I can take my time on it.

And as always PLEASE REVIEW! I'd love to hear what you all think! Do you like the flipping between viewpoints idea? Do you like Hopper's POV on El and Mike's relationship? Looking for some constructive criticism, and even some ideas as to scenes you'd all like to see!

Thank you so much!

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He sighs, "Doesn't mean I can't be protective" he argues back, and she rolls her eyes. She moves away from him. "Coffee?" she quips at him, and he nods his head in thanks.

"She can sleep in Will's room, he's sleeping in my bed" she addresses Hopper as she pours him out a warm cup of coffee. She turns and hands it to him, he accepts it, and gives it a small sip.

"Hm, then Wheeler will be on the couch" he says with a set voice, and Joyce chuckles again. He throws her a questioning look. "Oh, Hop, you kept those two from each other for a *year*, give them a break, what do you think is going to happen?" she questions.

Hopper's eyes go wide, "You *know* what I think will happen", he strains. And Joyce only shakes her head. "Hop, they're fourteen! And they just missed each other! You really think Mike's going to put the moves on El the first night she's back!?" she half laugh, half stresses to the poor man.

Hopper grumbles, "It's just, she's my girl, don't need some *boy* groping at her".

Joyce actually lets out a long laugh at this, "*Mike*, groping Eleven!? Hop, seriously?"

He fixes her with a steely glare, "Don't push it Joyce" he growls. And

before either of them can speak again, the door to Will's room opens, and Mike steps out in fresh sleepwear, his hair curling this way and that still damp from the shower.

Hopper catches his eyes and gives him a leveled look. This startles the boy slightly as he gingerly walks out into the kitchen, "Hey" he gives a small wave to the two adults.

Joyce gives him a warm smile as she stands, "How you feelin' Mike?" she rubs at his shoulders, her hands following his movements as he shrugs.

"Just been a long day is all" he murmurs, and Joyce pulls him into a small side hug, "Well, we'll be off to bed soon, you'll all feel better after a good night's sleep" she tries.

Mike nods slowly, but they are all brought out of their moment, once they hear the bathroom door click open. Their eyes follow the sound and movement, as two figures step out.

Hopper's gaze holds onto his little girls as she steps out of the bathroom, steam and Nancy following behind her, she has on fresh clothing and a large sweatshirt that swims past her waist, as she holds her dark clothing to her chest.

Her eyes catch his, and she smiles, this in turn warms his heart, and he returns it in stride. However, their small moment is quickly broken, when she moves her head to the left, ever so slightly, and she sees Mike standing there, staring at her.

The kid approaches her slowly, mouth slightly open, his lip turned into a half smile. She follows his gaze, and Jim watches as her cheeks start to darken. He watches as her eyes shift back and forth, desperately trying to read Mike's facial expression.

"Wow, El.." the kid starts, and Hopper can sense El's immediate insecurity start to fill her, he begins to stand.

But, Mike reaches out a slow hand as he reaches behind El's head, playing with a small curl, the kids smile grows bigger, "I never expected you to have curly hair its-", but he doesn't get to finish as

El's mouth turns upright and she finishes for him, "Pretty?" she finishes for him.

Mike's eyes meet hers, and they are beaming at one another, "The prettiest" he finishes, and she ducks her head in shyness, as both of their faces light up red.

Hopper silently grumbles to himself at their interaction, as they continue to stand in silence, just enjoying their moment together.

Nancy breaks the silence, as she places a gentle hand on El's shoulder. "She should be good, I helped her get that gunky makeup off her face, and the gel out of her hair" she gives the younger girl a small smile. El nods, "Yes, it was making my eyes itch" she states, rubbing her eyes and everyone around her lets out a light laugh.

Hopper moves towards the group of teens and his eyes meet El's, "Okay kid, it's time for you to get some rest, you'll take Will's room" he states gesturing to the door Mike had currently left open.

El merely nods at his statement, however, she doesn't move. Hopper gives her a curious look, "What's the matter kid?" he sighs.

El shrugs her shoulders, "Don't want to be alone" she whispers. Hopper scratches his beard, "I can sleep on the floor-" he starts, but is cut off by a shake of her head and she quickly whispers one word, "Mike".

Plain and simple, that's what she wants. And he feels his stomach tighten slightly at her statement. He quickly turns to the boy in question, who stands, fidgeting slightly at El's words, desperately trying to not meet his eyes.

He *really* doesn't want to deal with this right now, he's exhausted, his head is pounding, and he doesn't want to get into a talk with his girl about why boys and girls don't typically sleep in the same room together.

However, he assesses both the teens. He can see the bags and dark circles that lay beneath their heavy eyes. And he thinks back to Joyce's words, "*You kept them apart for a year, they just missed each*

other".

And he finally lets out a long grumbling breath. "Alright. Fine. Wheeler can sleep in the room with you-" and at this both young teens turn to smile at one another, "But" he quips, and both teens attentions are back on him, "Wheeler is on the floor, and the door stays open" he says levelly.

Wheeler gives him a tight stare, but El sighs softly and nods her head and whispers, "Compromise". And he can't help but allow a small smile to pull itself onto his face, feeling slightly proud of his girl.

He walks over to her, she bends her neck back to look him in the eyes, hers wide and searching as he places a hand on her head, ruffling her still wet curls, "Good word, kid" he mutters, and she beams at him.

The teens get settled in Will's room, El tucked up under Will's comforter, and Mike wrapped up in the sleeping bag that still laid there from his previous night sleeping over.

Hopper looks down at his girl, her eyes are fighting sleep, so he bends over and keeps it quick, "I'm so proud of you, kid" he slowly moves his hand and passes it through her hair. Her eyes close at the contact, "Thank you, Hop", is all she says, as she keeps her eyes shut.

He smiles lightly and stands to leave, he can see Wheeler peeking up at him slightly, he points a finger at him, "No funny business, Wheeler" he whispers to to him, giving him a tight stare. The kid doesn't say anything, but nods his head along with a slight eye roll, as he turns in his sleeping bag, back facing him.

Hopper sighs at the sight as he turns to move the door slightly closed, but also ajar, so he knows nothing will happen between them. He lets out another long breath, and makes his way over towards the couch, where Joyce has left a pillow and blanket, he greedily lays down, and he's pretty sure he's out before his head hits the pillow.

He is startled awake by a nightmare as he shoots up from his resting

position on the couch. He can feel the cold sweat sticking to him as he tries to calm his breathing and rapid heart beat.

He moves forward slightly rubbing both of his hands through his face, attempting to remind himself that it was just a dream, and El is okay.

Another breath escapes him, as he moves to stand. He can see out the window only a couple hours have passed, as the moon still glows as the only light. Hopper can't help himself by standing and moving towards Will's room, just to check and make sure she's okay.

He's prepared to see Wheeler and El sleeping in the same room. What he's not prepared for is the fact that Mike has moved so that he is on the bed with El. He can just barely make out that El is curled up under the sheets, while Mike remains on top. He can feel the monster inside him become agitated.

In his protective father's mind, he has every right to go in and separate the two from each other. However, the rational part of his brain takes another look at the scene. They are both curled up on their sides facing one another. Mike's arm is draped loosely around her midsection, while El's hand's are curled up into his shirt. Their breathing is soft, and even.

They're just sleeping, his rational mind reminds him. He moves to rest half of his body against the doorframe, watching the two teens sleep peacefully.

He is quickly reminded that this is probably one of the quietest she has been since taking her in. For, he can't count the amount of times she had awoken him from a dead sleep screaming, crying or having a 'night episode'.

But, seeing her sleeping so serenely stops him from making any rash movements or decisions. He knew, that taking her in meant that Wheeler was probably going to be apart of that deal as well. He just wasn't prepared for this at all. Knowing his little girl was in love, and now that she had been reunited with that love, she wasn't going to let him go.

Okay, soooo, what did you guys think? I really like the Hopper and El, father/daughter relationship and I can't wait to see how it changes in season 3, especially since Mike and El will be dating!

And as I said in the beginning, the next chapter will be Mike and El's take on this current scene, and I will flip between them and Hopper with each scene I choose to write on. Because I can't help but write some good Mileven fluff as well!

Also, I'm still writing Stranger Tides, so please don't worry! Just had this floating around and needed to get it out there, and see what people's opinions are on this! And with this story it gives me more leeway where each chapter is almost like a one shot, so I can take my time on it.

And as always PLEASE REVIEW! I'd love to hear what you all think! Do you like the flipping between viewpoints idea? Do you like Hopper's POV on El and Mike's relationship? Looking for some constructive criticism, and even some ideas as to scenes you'd all like to see!

Thank you so much!

2. The Gate is Closed(Mileven)

I'm blown away by how many have already responded to the first chapter and it got me all psyched to write this one. I'm going to really try to at least get the chapters that coincide with one another out in the same week, but, no promises as I want to finish Stranger Tides too!

But, here is my take on Mike and El's POV during the night after the gate was closed! Much longer than I thought it was going to be, but that's okay!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things!

They both remember the extensive heartbreak, the loneliness, the sadness, the frustration that stretched between the both of them. Months of him grasping onto the small hope he felt that somehow she was still out there. And for her, she spent months knowing he was there, only miles away, unable to reach him, her heart growing sadder.

Each had fought the monster of uncertainty: *was she still alive, will she ever see him again?* The hollow sense of being alone, that no one understood the pain that was deeply etched within each of their beings.

She remembers the boiling rage that sat deep within her core each time her guardian would say 'soon'. The empty promises that he never seemed to keep. She felt as if she was a prisoner, alone, the only company, a middle age man who kept her safe.

It took her a long time after the dark events of her life for her to realize exactly what her guardian, her father, was trying to do for her. And it took her many deep thoughts to not stay mad at the man who gave her shelter from the cold, and food in her stomach. But, when you're in love, it's easier to blame others for any hardships that follow.

He will never forget watching, in horror, someone he thought would be a part of his life disappear before his eyes. He never believed that a girl, whom he had only known for a week, would become apart of his heart, forever. He had never experienced love before, maybe some passing interests here and there, but in no way had he ever imagined a small crush on some mysterious girl would affect him in such away.

He never experienced heartbreak, or such a deep circle of despair before he met her. And in one moment, she was gone. He spent days, weeks, months, almost a full year, desperately calling out to her, hoping, wishing that maybe, just maybe, she could hear him. But, no answer ever came, and he held onto his dimming hope in a small place in his heart, because he couldn't just let her go, no, for, he loved her.

For both of them, on that dark November night, the thought of them reuniting didn't even cross either of their minds. Both bound and determined to stop whatever this new darkness was, they had put their hearts on the side.

But, when she approached the Byer's home, she told herself that he wasn't there, she didn't want to give herself any false hope. Upon opening the old creaky door though, and her dark eyes falling on the group of people before her, there was only one that she had eyes for, and it seemed as if he was doing the same.

Their dark eyes met, and both could feel the deep stirring within their hearts. Each had locked away the other, just incase. Their watery faces were able to pull wide smiles as they took each other in.

"Mike" she whispered, taking a step forward. "Eleven" he sighed as he moved and closed the gap between them. Their breaths breaking between them at the force of their hug, as they buried their faces into each others necks.

Mike held her close, afraid that pulling away too soon meant that she would be gone again, that this moment was just another one of his stupid dreams playing with his mind. But, as he stood there, holding the mysterious girl within his arms, breathing in her scent, he knew this wasn't a dream.

El couldn't help but allow the tears she had been holding in for almost a month pour from her eyes. She held onto the boy as if he would dissipate into smoke, like he always did in the dark void. El could actually hold him, and feel him pressed up against her, she knew he wasn't going anywhere.

Even though neither wanted to break apart, they did so just enough to see the others face. Both with giddy smiles and tear streaked faces. Mike spoke first, "I never gave up on you, I called you, every night, *every night*, for-". "Three hundred and fifty three days" she finished with a sad look.

Her words surprise him, his face going into surprise. "I heard" she admitted to the boy, who seemed to deflate slightly. "W-Why didn't you answer, to let me know you were okay?" he asks, his face now holding uncertainty.

El opens her mouth to speak again, but her answer is cut short by another voice who answers for her, "Because I wouldn't let her", Hoppers voice cuts between them as he steps towards them.

Mike's face dropping at the man's words as he watches the older man approach his long lost love. He listens to their exchange, "Where were you?" Hopper nods to the girl, and instead of answering she throws back the same question, with some venom beneath it. And with neither answering the others question, Hopper reaches out and pulls the girl into a hug, and she doesn't hesitate it leaning into his embrace.

However, it doesn't last long as Mike takes a step forward, his heart rate picking up when realization finally hits him. "You've been hiding her" he accuses, not letting the man answer, his anger finally begins to seep out of him, and he can't help but reach forward and push at the man, "You've been hiding her this whole time!" he growls.

But before he can get another word in, the man grabs onto Mike, holding him, their eyes meet as he growls, "Hey! Let' .Alone" the man enunciates each of his words, and Mike has no choice but to be pulled along.

He glances back slightly, his and El's eye catch in one last sad

moment, as Hopper tosses him into the closest room.

The anger finally erupts from him in all furry, he starts spewing before Hopper even let's go of his arm, "Protecting her?" he starts before throwing it back stronger his second time around, "Protecting her!?" he yells.

The man before him attempts to remain calm as he shuts the door behind him, as he takes off the gun slung around his shoulder, "Listen, the more people who know about her, the more danger she's in and the more danger you and your family are in", Hopper barely gets the words out before Mike lashes back in, "Oh, so I should be thanking you then!" he spits, his eyes red with furry.

And finally Hopper has reached his point too, "I'm not asking you to thank me kid, I'm asking you to understand!" he bites back.

Mike looks at him dumbfounded, as he throws his arms around wildly, "I don't, I don't understand!" he barks back.

Hopper tries to level him down, "That's fine kid, just don't blame her!" And it's these words that push Mike to his limit, *he's honestly thinking I'd blame her*, cascades through his mind. Finally, it's there that everything that has been lumped together in the past year comes barreling out of him, the confusion, doubt, anger, depression, it feeds him into his next words, "I don't blame her, I blame you!" he points an accusatory finger at the man who has hid her for so long.

"That's okay kid, that's okay" Hopper flings back, and finally Mike snaps, "No, nothing about this is okay!" he shouts, "Nothing about this is okay!" he repeats as his blind range moves towards Hopper, his fists begin to move on their own accord, his emotional baggage finally having a reason, finally targeting a person to take this all out on.

He starts throwing insults at the man, as he moves forward in furry, he can just barely hear what the man is saying to him, until he is shouting "Liar!" to him multiple times, so he can get the message. When finally, Mike feels two hands wrap around his arms, which stops his flailing fists. But he doesn't relent, attempting to pour out his pent up feelings to the man who caused all of his pain.

But then, he's being held within the man's arms, and his anger dissipates, as sadness quickly takes its place. He can feel the warm tears pooling out of his eyes, his body becoming numb as Hopper holds him.

"Why?" he cries out as the man holds him. *Why did you keep us apart?* Is what he wants to ask, but he's too emotionally drained to just stand there and cry into the man's arms, who begins to envelop him in a hug. "It's okay kid, I'm sorry", "I'm sorry" he mumbles down to him. And although he hears the man's words, they barely touch him in this moment as he still feels the furry within him.

After awhile, Mike slowly pulls away, he wipes away his angry tears using the sleeve of his sweatshirt, he doesn't make eye contact with the man who stands before him.

"Kid", Hopper offers quietly, willing the teen to look at him. Mike throws him a short look, to say he's listening, but honestly wants nothing to do with him. Hopper sighs, "I didn't want to keep you away from each other, but...I had to keep her safe" he admits with a shrug of uncertainty. Because in reality, after El's tantrum about the boy standing before him, and now *his* outlash, he's not sure if he made the right decision after all.

"I could have kept her safe too", Mike whispers as he continues to wipe at his face. Hopper shakes his head, "I didn't know what was going on with the lab, if they knew she was still alive, I had to wait".

Mike glares at him again, "You took Will there, you obviously trusted the lab enough to help him!" he seethed at the man.

"Kid, I-" he started, but a soft gentle knock on the door disrupted their conversation, "Everything, okay?" a gentle voice filled the space. Hopper sighed as he looked back at the teenage boy in front of him, as his face lights up at even the sound of her voice.

Hopper turns and opens the door, allowing El to enter, she casts Hopper a quick look, but then moves towards Mike, a bit more tentatively, shyness following her.

And as if a switch had been flipped, Mike's mood shifts. "El" he

breathes, not being able to keep his eyes off of her. She gives him a soft smile as she approaches him, she gently reaches out her hand and clasps it with his, "Are you, okay?" she searches his face, "I heard yelling", she quirks her eyes at him, and then to Hopper.

Hopper shakes his head, "We were just talking, kid, no worries", he shrugs his shoulders. The girl turns back to the boy who shoots Hopper a seething look, but the second El's eyes are back on him, he immediately softens.

"We need to figure out the next step" she says quietly, "We need your help, both of you" she looks between the two men in her life. They both give her a quick nod of the head, before they exit Will's room together.

The next several minutes are spent with the gang devising their next steps in taking down the Mind Flayer, as they ultimately agree on the only reasonable notion is for El to shut the gate, and to get whatever is in Will, out.

They break off into teams, Hopper carefully carries Will out to Joyce's car as he barks orders to Jonathan about finding the cabin. While they are getting this settled, Mike walks with El out onto the porch, their hands had stayed connected throughout their entire discussion, and they were tentative to break their connection.

El steps off of the porch as she watches Hopper load Will into the car. She feels a squeeze against her hand, she turns towards the source, her eyes meet Mike's sad face. She turns to face him.

El can tell that there's so much he wants to say, but he's trying to determine the right one in this moment. He moves his hands so that they are grasping onto both of her arms, he pulls her closer, "Just be careful alright, I can't lose you again" his voice is shaky, knowing that even though they had just been reunited, they were being separated again.

Her heart breaks silently within her, as she knows where she is going will be dangerous, but she wants to be brave for the boy before her. So, she shakes her head and gives a tiny smile, "You won't lose me".

"Promise?" He softly questions, pulling her forward slightly, she watches as a stray tear escapes his eye. And she can feel hers watering and pooling as well, she swallows, "Promise" she says boldly.

And it's within that moment that El feels that magnetic pull that she had felt with this boy since day one. Her memory briefly flashes back to their moment in the cafeteria, where Mike was desperately trying to explain what the phrase 'more than friend' meant, to her. And when he grew silent for a moment after his stuttering, and he leaned forward suddenly, his lips connecting with hers.

In that moment, she had no idea what it had meant, but the feeling that resonated through her when he did so, she knew he felt something for her, as she did for him. And she never got a moment to ask him what it was he had given her. But, she soon found out after watching endless hours of television and seeing a couple on one of her favorite shows mimic the act.

She won't forget the excitement she elicited, as she pointed at the screen and yelled for Hopper to explain what they were doing. Hopper, usually fine with explain things to the young girl, was flustered in this moment, and simply answered, "It's a kiss, people do that when they like each other".

El's eyes would go wide at this explanation as she whispered to him, "More than friends?" and he would merely nod, "Yeah kid, more than friends".

Back in her moment, she knew what she felt was 'more than friends' and she was determined to make sure Mike knew she understood. Her eyes flickered down to his lips, back up to his eyes and then back down to his lips. She lifted herself up on her tiptoes, silently remarking as to how much taller he had grown. She could feel him moving forward too, their breaths mingling together, their noses brushing, she felt both of their wanting of how long they had awaited this moment.

Lips just about to graze one another, their quickly brought apart by, "El, come on, time to go". El whips her head around to Hopper, who's watching them with an unsatisfied look. She sighs, turning back

towards Mike, as they both know they've lost their moment. But El doesn't leave before throwing her arms around Mike's neck one last time, his arms wrapping tightly around her waist.

She desperately wants to cry against him, for this nightmare to go away, so it can be just them, but she holds herself together, slowly pulling away from him, she offers him a soft smile.

He returns it with a watery one of his own, as he nods and says, "Okay" just barely above a whisper, as they slowly let go of one another. She hops into Hopper's old police rig, and as they drive away, she turns and her eyes lock with Mike's.

Both filled with anxiety and uncertainty, they hold each other's gazes, until they can no more.

El will never forget the exhaustion that pours out of her being the second the gate is closed. The relief that washes over her in the sense, that she has finally stopped what she accidentally started.

"You did good kid, you did so, good", she can hear Hopper's voice in her ear as he holds her in a tight embrace, basking in the moment of finality.

But, the first thing that pops into her mind is the fact that she's okay, and that the first thing she wants to, no, *needs* to do is make sure Mike knows she's okay. It would break her, and him even more so if he didn't know she was safe.

So, she whispers to the man holding her, "Mike", in a raspy voice. She can feel Hopper's chuckle against her, "Yeah, kid, I'll get you to Wheeler", he states as he moves to get his feet up underneath him, as he carries her bridal style to his cruiser.

Once inside she can feel the waves of tiredness hit her like a ton of bricks, but she attempts to stay semi-conscious so that she can see Mike again. "Mike" she whispers his name, more to herself than anything, a small chant for her to hold onto so that she stays conscious.

"Don't worry kid, we'll be there soon" She hears Hopper comment, as her head nods this way and that, fighting the sleep.

"Okay, we're here" she just barely hears Hopper's voice as they pull into the Byers driveway. She's even less aware that the second she feels Hopper switch the cruiser into park, the door beside her is yanked open.

She whips her head to whomever has opened the door, however, a small feeling within her already knows who it is. El moves her body clumsily to the side, as she basically falls out of the cruiser, and into the arms of the one person she wanted to see most.

"Mike!" she cries out, as she wraps her arms around his neck, as she burrows her face into his chest. And she finally allows all the tears to finally escape her. "Eleven!" she hears Mike's muffled voice against her shoulder, as he too begins to cry with her. Both feeling the emotional drain in which they have both felt in the last year. But, now, they were finally together, and everything was okay in this moment.

"You're safe, you're okay" she feels his breath tickle her ear, she pulls back just enough to give him a wide grin. "I promised" is all she says before he pulls her back into a tight embrace. And she's surprised when she feels his cold lips pressed against her cheek. She can't help but melt at the gesture, pulling the boy closer.

The both of them could have stayed within that moment forever, but, a gruff voice breaks them apart just enough to turn their heads, "Come on you two, let's go get cleaned up" Hopper nods towards the Byers residence.

Mike can't help but fix Hopper with a stare, in which he returns. And Mike fills a surge of wanting to show Hopper how much he truly cares for this girl, so, with the strength and determination he has left within him, he moves El slightly, bends down so that he places one arm behind her back, and one behind her legs, Mike lifts El into his arms.

The act startles El, and she lets out a squeal, he turns his head to hers, and he can see that she's smiling brightly at him. She gently

wraps her arms around his neck. And with that one look, he feels like he can do anything.

Mike can feel his tired body struggle with El's weight, but he pushes it to the back of his mind, wanting to show Hopper he's strong enough to protect this girl he cares so deeply about.

Hopper opens the door to the Byers home, allowing him to step in with El in his arms first, and the moment they are noticed, questions of every form are thrown at them like exploding bombs.

Thankfully, Hopper takes this cue, and settles everyone down, allowing Mike to lay El gently onto the couch. Making sure she is comfortable he kneels down to her side, their hands entangling together.

While the commotion somewhat continues behind them, Mike chooses to block all of this out, and sets every sense on El.

He takes this moment to really take her in, and he silently can't believe how much she's changed in a year, granted he knows he's gone through his own changes as well, there's something different about seeing this girl before him, and how much stronger she looks.

But the one thing that definitely catches his attention is her hair, he smiles quietly admiring it from afar. His eyes continue to greedily soak in everything about her. He momentarily forgets where he is when a soft hand reaches out to touch his face.

In his moment of taking her in, he doesn't realize she's been doing the same with her tired eyes. Their gaze meets, and everything disappears around them. "Hi", she whispers tiredly, he laughs lightly, "Hey" he greets back.

They can't help but absorb every ounce of each other, still in the disbelief that they are actually within inches of each other. Mike could have stayed there forever, but a gruff voice brings him from their moment with, "Come on kid time to-" but before Hopper could even finish his sentence, Mike knowing exactly what the man was going to say, he whips his head around, almost giving him whiplash

as he shouts, "No!"

Mike stares the man down with a solid gaze, to Mike, this wasn't up for discussion. He was tired, but still determined, he just got El back, twice, and he wasn't up for a third goodbye.

He and Hopper continue their stare down, but Mike loses Hopper gaze as he watches his eyes move to something behind him. But then, he's surprised to see Hopper relax slightly, and he lets out a long sigh, "Okay, fine kid, you can stay-" and at this the Mike relaxes and lets out his own held breath.

"But, you both need to get cleaned up first, and you're sleeping on the floor", Jim says with a gruff firmness.

Mike nods at him, accepting his words. He turns back towards El, whose eyelids are fighting the sleep her body so desperately craves. He turns halfway over his shoulder whispering, "Nancy's still here, she can help El".

He can see out of the corner of his eye Hopper giving him a nod. And he returns his attention to El. But, he is once again disrupted by his friends surrounding behind him, wanting to say goodbye to El.

Mike barely allows them enough room to sneak in, Lucas and Dustin giving her small half hugs, and Max gives her a small wave, in which El, very reluctantly returns. This catches Mike's attention briefly, but decides to put it behind him for now.

Once the boys and Max move away from the tired girl, Mike immediately returns to her side. He hears them cast one more 'goodbye' as the door creaks open and they are gone, leaving Mike and El alone.

Mike lets out a sigh he doesn't realize he's holding, which catches El's attention, "Are you okay?" she asks. He gives her a soft smile, "It's just crazy...I've been dying to see you for a year...and..." he stops and just stares at her. El's warm eyes gazing into his own dark ones, she gives him a grin, "I know, I feel it too" she whispers to him.

His body relaxes slightly, his heart soaring knowing that she feels

exactly as he does. He again feels the pull that this girl seems to have on him. And he can see it in her face, that she feels it too, they slowly begin to lean in.

"Hey, Mike, I just finished cleaning up, why don't you-" Nancy's voice startles the two teens away from each other as if they've just been shocked. Mike's eyes go wide at the sight of his sister.

Nancy can't help but give a knowing look, "Was I...interrupting something?" she asks coolly, her eyes switching between her brother and the girl whom has captured his affections.

Mike's face turns red quickly, and surprisingly so does El's, this makes Nancy chuckle. Mike lets out a groan, as he finally stands from his spot. "Uh, no...everything's fine" Mike shrugs as if nothing happened.

He turns down to look at El, who's meeting his eyes, and her look is quite sad, which breaks Mike's heart a bit. He throws a frightened expression her way and he quickly bends down once again, and turns so only she can hear him, "El, please don't worry, I-I'll explain it later", he gives her a pleading look.

And at his reassuring smile, El's face relaxes and she gives him a small nod. "I'll get cleaned up first, then Nancy can help you out, okay?" he speaks gently to the girl.

"Okay" she responds, as Mike throws her a quick smile, and heads towards the bathroom.

El can't help but watch him the entire way, honestly hating being not within arms reach of him. Her gut twists slightly. However, she's brought out of her thoughts when she feels a weight sink her legs down into the couch. She turns her attention towards Nancy who sits by her feet.

El hasn't been around too many people, other females especially, so she still has trouble reading expressions and body language. She can't help but give the girl a questioning look. And at this, Nancy chuckles.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" El can't help but question. The older girl looks down into her lap, and then looks up slowly, giving El

a small grin, she shakes her head, "So, you and my brother?"

El furrows her brows together, not fully understanding Nancy's question. At the peculiar look and silence that El stretches between them, Nancy giggles again. "I mean...you two seem to really care about each other" she says sincerely.

The younger girl feels herself soften at her words, still taking in the female beside her. The silence stretches again, but Nancy breaks it again, "He was so lost without you" she whispers.

And this immediately captures El's attention, their eyes meet. "He..didn't really want to talk about it, but...I knew he missed you, I could hear him sometimes, him trying to contact you through the supercom".

Nancy's eyes search El's face, "I don't know what you two have, but there's something there I've never seen between two people" she gives the younger girl a warm look.

But then she shakes her head, "I can't wait to give him shit, I asked him last year if he liked you and he said 'no'" she continues to laugh turning away from El.

However, El's eyes widen in alarm, which catches Nancy off guard, and she opens her mouth in shock, "Oh, no, El, I didn't mean it like that!" she hurries to calm the girl.

El can feel the uncertainty rise within her once again, "I just meant, he was lying about not like-liking, you" she desperately tried to explain.

The younger girl can't help but quirk her eyebrow up to the other girl, "Like-liking?" she repeats back. Nancy has to take a moment to realize that El wasn't raised like a typical person, and she didn't understand what her words meant.

So, Nancy sighs, and gives El a warm look, she tentatively reaches out her hand and places it gently on El's leg, attempting to make sure the younger girl knows she's being sincere. "It means...that he likes you more than a friend, that you're extra special to him" she explains.

And at those words, El lights up immediately a smile splaying across her face, "That's what he was trying to say" she says quietly to herself. Now, it's Nancy's turn to have a questioning look, "What do you mean?" she questions the younger girl.

El can't help but blush, as she remembers the moment in the cafeteria once again, "Mike, we were alone at the school...the boys had gone to get pudding...and he asked me to live with you all" she begins, Nancy hanging onto her every word.

El's eyes meet the older girls, "He said you'd be like my sister, and I asked if he'd be like my brother, but he said no 'it's different" she shrugged. "He then asked me to go to the snowball and that you don't go with your sister and that you go with a person who's 'more than a friend'" and now her blush is tenfold, she ducks her face from the older girl at her next words.

"And then...he leaned in and kissed me" she whispers. And at her words she hears the older girl let out a gasp, in which grabs El's attention. Nancy is sitting with her mouth wide open, but it slowly twitches into a grin, she leans into the younger girl, "He kissed you?" she smirks.

El nods slowly, "Yes, it was...nice" she smiles to herself. Nancy can't hold herself together anymore, "Oh my god, my little brother, and his first girlfriend" she squeals.

El shutters a little bit at the girls loud voice, but there's a word that catches her attention, she opens her mouth to ask, but, the bathroom door opens, and she can't help her eyes from moving there immediately.

A gust of warm steam billows out, as Mike sticks his head out, "Hey, I'm done, if you want to head in, I'm going to change into some of Will's old clothes, these ones are filthy", he gestures to the shirt and jeans he haphazardly threw on mostly just to cover himself.

Nancy nods to her brother, "Okay, I'll get El set up then", Mike nods and then disappears down the hallway. The older girl turns to El, "Come on, I'll help you get that makeup off" she moves to stand, and El throws her legs over the couch to follow.

She and Nancy enter the still steamy bathroom, and shut the door behind them. Nancy moves to find some rubbing alcohol and cotton swabs and moves to help El get the dark makeup off.

El sits silently while Nancy helps wash away the days worth of old makeup and dirt from her face. Nancy takes the silence as El needing to process and doesn't press her.

Even though the question sits on the tip of El's tongue, she finds herself not wanting to ask Nancy, for the second her eyes fell on Mike, she knew she wanted to ask him instead.

"Okay, the makeups all gone, I'm going to find you some old clothes from Joyce so you can get into the shower, sound good?" Nancy asks the girl, in which she merely nods in return.

The older girl leaves the bathroom, in which El moves to get the shower started, and she moves quickly to finally get the days worth of disgust off of her body.

Once El is finished with her shower, she gets dressed into the clothes that Nancy had left out for her. She finishes zipping up the overly large sweatshirt, when she hears a knock on the door, Nancy's head peaks in, "Hey, are you all set?" she asks the girl, who only nods in return.

Nancy gives a small smile, "We should get out there, Hopper's grilling Mike" she points her head towards the direction of the kitchen, laughing slightly.

At hearing the word 'Mike', El lights up instantly and moves to follow the girl outside the bathroom.

As she exits the bathroom, holding her borrowed clothes from her sister, she pads quietly into the kitchen. Her eyes are first met with Hopper's who gives her a warm smile, but soon her attention is turned to the dark haired boy also standing in the kitchen.

She can't help but notice how curly his hair actually is, just like hers, and she remembers suddenly, he's never seen it curly, and she is

suddenly overwhelmed with feeling subconscious, especially with the way he's looking at her. She can't help but feel the panic set in, *he doesn't like it*. Goes through her head.

"Wow, El.." he starts, and El freezes in her place, feeling unsure within this moment. But, it seems to immediately disapeate the second Mike's mouth begins to turn upwards and he reaches to touch her hair, his eyes warm.

"I never expected you to have curly hair its-", but he doesn't get to finish as El's mouth turns upright and she finishes for him, "Pretty?" she finishes for him.

Mike's eyes meet hers, and they are beaming at one another, "The prettiest" he finishes, and she ducks her head in shyness, as both of their faces light up red. The two of them just releshing in the moment together.

However, Nancy breaks the silence, as she places a gentle hand on El's shoulder. "She should be good, I helped her get that gunky makeup off her face, and the gel out of her hair" she gives the younger girl a small smile. El nods, "Yes, it was making my eyes itch" she states, rubbing her eyes and everyone around her lets out a light laugh.

Hopper moves towards the group of teens and his eyes meet El's, "Okay kid, it's time for you to get some rest, you'll take Will's room" he states.

El merely nods at his statement, however, she doesn't move. Hopper gives her a curious look, "What's the matter kid?" he sighs.

El shrugs her shoulders, "Don't want to be alone" she whispers. Hopper scratches his beard, "I can sleep on the floor-" he starts, but is cut off by a shake of her head and she quickly whispers one word, "Mike".

Plain and simple, that's what she wants. El knows it is a touchy subject, she doesn't know *why*, but she doesn't want to be more than a foot away from the boy.

She watches Hopper intently, she can tell he is going through every argument within his head, but, she can also tell he's just as tired as she is, he doesn't want to fight. And he finally lets out a long grumbling breath. "Alright. Fine. Wheeler can sleep in the room with you-" and at this both young teens turn to smile at one another, "But" he quips, and both teens attentions are back on him, "Wheeler is on the floor, and the door stays open" he says levelly.

Mike can't help but give him a tight stare, he's honestly a little ticked at the fact that Hopper would think he'd do anything to El, but El sighs beside him softly and she nods her head and whispers, "Compromise".

Mike's eyebrows quirk up at the word, but he melts slightly as to how much she has grown in this last year.

Hopper walks over to El, as she bends her neck back to look him in the eyes, hers wide and searching as he places a hand on her head, ruffling her still wet curls, "Good word, kid" he mutters, and she beams at him.

The teens get settled in Will's room, El tucked up under Will's comforter, and Mike wrapped up in the sleeping bag that still laid there from his previous night sleeping over.

Hopper looks down at his girl, her eyes are fighting sleep, so he bends over and keeps it quick, "I'm so proud of you, kid" he slowly moves his hand and passes it through her hair. Her eyes close at the contact, "Thank you, Hop", is all she says, as she keeps her eyes shut.

He smiles lightly and stands to leave, he can see Wheeler peeking up at him slightly, he points a finger at him, "No funny business, Wheeler" he whispers to to him, giving him a tight stare. The kid doesn't say anything, but nods his head along with a slight eye roll, as he turns in his sleeping bag, back facing him.

The teens listen as the door slowly creaks somewhat closed behind them. However, Mike stays put for a couple of minutes, afraid that Hopper was still there watching them, he didn't dare do anything and be afraid to get caught.

El's probably exhausted anyways, he musses to himself and he can feel the tiredness flit through him as well. His eyes grow heavy, and he decides to not fight the sleep any longer.

His eyes close and no sooner does he begin to feel at ease he hears a small voice from above him, "Mike?" El's soft voice perks his attention immediately.

He sits up faster than he meant to, but he can't ignore her for any sense of his being. "What's wrong El?" he says as quietly as possible.

"Nothing, I...just like hearing your voice" she says and he can see through the light of the door that she has turned to face him, as she is lying on her side.

He tentatively reaches out a hand and he finds hers, they immediately entangled together. They both let out sighs of contentment as they relish in being close to one another.

Mike leans against the bed, setting his head down next to El's, his thumb strokes hers in a gentle rhythm. He can make out her steady breathing, which instantly relaxes him, he lets out a long yawn, which El giggles at.

"You're tired" she states, as she moves her other hand to tangle through his dark locks, he sighs at her ministrations.

"So are you" he smiles back. He's pretty sure he can hear her eyes rolling, she huffs, "You can't sleep like this" she remarks at his uncomfortable position. He shrugs, "I don't care, I'm close to you" he admits. And through the dark El meets his eyes, which are full of so much care and compassion, she's pretty sure her heart melts.

"Mike" she whispers, as she moves her hand and gently caresses his cheek. But she moves away suddenly, which startles Mike.

He watches her through the darkness as she shifts and moves to the other 'side' of Will's twin bed. She pats the other side closest to him, "Lay here" she almost commands.

Mike pulls away from the bed slightly and shakes his head, "No, El, I can't, you heard Hopper" he stresses, and in that moment he turns

ever so slightly to see if he's in the doorway.

He hears the girl sigh, "I don't care what he says" she states bluntly, which makes Mike chuckle at her forwardness. He reaches forward slightly, finding her hand once again, "But I do, El. I don't want to get on his bad side, I...don't want to not see you again" he admits.

El squeezes Mike's hand, and they make eye contact once again, "Mike, three hundred and fifty three days we've been apart, he can deal with it" and again Mike chuckles at her choice of words.

"You watch a lot of television, don't you?" he asks her with a quirked smile. She nods in answer, as she pulls at his hand, "Mike, please, I just want you close, no...funny business" she states.

And Mike sighs, not really sure if she understand that innuendo. But her face is pleading, and he can feel her magnetic pull. He lets out a long breath as he disentangles himself from his sleeping bag, and he moves very slowly to pull himself onto the *very* small bed.

He lays down cautiously as he turns to face El, he can see the smile lighting up her face, which makes him melt. She scoots so that she is closer to him, she grabs onto his shirt so that their faces are close, and he can't help but cast an arm over her waist at her movements, attempting to steady himself. He blushes and goes to move his arm when he hears "Don't, it's okay" breathed into his face.

So, he leaves his arm around her waist, as he attempts to relax. Being honest with himself he *never* thought he would be *this* close to a girl, let alone sleeping in the same bed together.

But, El's eyes catch his, both of them glistening in the dark, and he feels his body relax slightly, he remarks as to how natural this position feels for the both of them. And he silently hopes this isn't the only time they get to do this, he blushes at the thought.

El moves her head slightly, so that their foreheads touch, and their noses bump into one another. She nudges him lightly, "I missed you" she says in such a sweet and tender tone, Mike begins to feel all of the emotions of the past year weld up inside him, but he doesn't want to begin to cry again.

"I...I missed you so, so much, El" he can't help let out in a warbly breath, and El pulls him closer. "Don't be sad, we're together now" she says to him, their eyes both watering in the dark.

He sighs and he pulls El flush against him, he buries his head into her neck, "You're real, you're here, it's...so hard to believe, I...I've dreamed of this moment and...it's never real" he allows a few tears to leak from his eyes, which land on El's neck.

Her eyes let go of a few tears as well, "Me too" she whispers into his neck. And they hold onto each other as if they're going to be swept away, content in the moment of being together.

El pulls back slightly, she gives him a watery smile, "This is nice" she whispers. And Mike chuckles at her, "Yeah, it is".

And, once again, the pull is there, and El feels it, "Mike", she whispers, her face impossibly close to his. "Yes, El" his eyes move from her eyes to her lips, and back to her eyes again. "In the school...when you kissed me" she starts and she can immediately feel Mike tense in her arms.

He begins to panic, "I'm really sorry about that El, I shouldn't of, it was stupid-" but he's cut off by El's finger on his mouth. His eyes widen, as she watches her grin. "Mike, it's okay, I liked it...*really* liked it" she stresses.

The relief washes over Mike in an instant, he relaxes once again. "You did?" he can't help but ask her with a sheepish grin on his face. He feels her nod against him.

Her eyes lock with his, "Can...can we do it again?" she asks shyly. Mike's pretty sure his heart leaps into his throat at her words. "You want to?" he questions, as he really can't understand how he got this lucky to have met this amazing girl, who actually *wants* to kiss him.

"Interrupted, twice" her eyes dance with amusement, which makes Mike laugh. "Yeah, we did, didn't we?" he shakes his head.

And then, Mike can feel her moving closer to him, her head tilting just slightly as their breaths tickle each others faces.

Their eyes both close as the gap between finally closes, and their mouths have found one another. It's soft, and gentle, and they stay there for a moment. Mike squeezes at El's hip bringing her just a bit closer, as their mouths move just slightly against each other.

They finally break apart and let out their held breaths, both grinning like mad fools. "I liked that one more" El says bashfully, Mike laughs at her cuteness as he rubs his nose against hers. "Me, too" he agrees, his heart warm.

And they stay there, wrapped in each others arms as the exhaustion and elation of the day finally move through their bodies, no longer able to fight sleep. Their eyes drift closed, knowing, that the person they have both longed to see, will be right there beside them when they awake.

Okay, so that was chapter 1.2, and like I said before I really hated how they had nothing about what happened right after the gate was closed, so, here's my take on it!

As I said earlier too, these will all be separate one shots focusing on a particular scene, told in 2 different perspectives. I'm going to try to follow the story in a way that follows them as they age. I've gotten a few suggestions already, which I will definitely take into account, however, they might come down the road after I write some scenes that I think will happen during season 3 and onwards.

Let me know what you think, and as always, I LOVE REVIEWS!

Thank you!

3. The Morning After(Hopper POV)

WOW! You are all amazingly awesome! I can't believe the love I've received for this story and I really can't thank you all enough, it makes my heart so full!

Also, I was trying to figure out why my first chapter was longer than my second, which didn't make any sense...Well, as I'm sure you all saw, I very silly copy and pasted my text twice (Insert face slap here). I attempted to fix it, and I hope it is now, but, I apologize for that and will be sure to check more carefully next time.

Also, thank you for the suggestions as well! I will add them to my list, but I do have a small timeline I want to follow too. Like, what happens after the last chapter? So, that's where I'm headed next! So, here we go!

Chapter 2: The Morning After: Hopper's POV

He thought the first time he would ever catch his daughter in bed with a boy, would be the day he would either drop dead of a heart attack, or, it would be the boy's final breaths on this earth. For Hopper however, neither of those events happened.

Even though waving a gun in front of Wheeler's face crossed his mind a couple of times, in a very threatening manner, he was too exhausted to think much more on the subject after he had come across said sight in the middle of the night.

Instead, Hopper took in a deep breath and chose to leave it for the morning. Which, annoyingly to Hopper came way sooner than he had hoped.

A loud crash from the kitchen startled him awake, along with a whispered, "Shit!", as it sounded as if something was being scrapped from the floor.

Sleep still held onto him as he slowly sat up. The blanket that had barely covered him throughout the night laid piled on the floor. He

raised his still somewhat dirty hands to his face, as he rubbed his fingers into his eyes. He moaned at the earliest, and huffed as he stood.

His steps staggered as the stiffness in his limbs held tight from the adrenaline that had coursed through his body the night before. As he shuffled his feet into the kitchen, he stood within the small arch way, leaning slightly into the wall, as he focused on the person who was crouched down, frantically picking at the floor.

He realized that the person had not heard his approach, especially since they were muttering to themselves over what a clutz they were. Hopper let out a long sigh, "You know" he started, and the person bent over whipped around so quickly their brown, frizzled hair whipped across their face, giving them a more wild look. "You could have waited like, *one* more hour before making a mess" he teased.

Joyce stood with a huff as she pulled her flyaway hair from her face. She rolled her eyes, "I couldn't sleep, needed some coffee" she muttered as she moved to throw the broken remnants of a coffee mug into the nearby trash.

Hopper watched as she threw away the remains, the cup making a resounding 'thud' as it hit the bottom. Joyce turned back to him, wiping her hands. She gives him a look, "Why are you up anyways?" she questions as she turns towards the coffee maker, pouring in the grounds, and flicking the switch to 'on'.

He can't but give her an astonished face as he pulls back and chuckles low, "Well, I planned on sleeping more till, *someone* decided to break a coffee mug, it makes a great alarm clock by the way" he teases the woman.

She huffs as she pulls at her robe and tucks the cozy material up into her armpits as she crosses her arms, "I didn't mean to wake you" she mutters, as she leans against the counter.

Hopper approaches her and decides to copy her motions, leaning against the counter as well. He turns his head to look at her. And he takes that moment to take her in. He knows that she didn't take a shower last night, so her hair is wild and crazy and coated with a

small amount of grease. But, what he hates to see the most are the dark circles and growing bags that hug her eyes. He knows she's tired, but afraid of what may come when she closes her eyes.

As if she can feel his gaze upon her, Joyce tilts her head up to the taller man, she gives him a steely stare, "Don't look at me like that" she says quietly.

Hopper shrugs, "Like what?" he inquires. She shakes her head, "Like you're going to pity me the rest of my life" she sighs. And with this she sniffles a bit, and wipes her nose with her robe.

He can't help but reach out and pull her into a side hug, attempting to bring her some kind of comfort, he knows she is still feeling the loss of Bob. They stand their in silence, just reflecting in the moment of everything that has happened.

Joyce sniffles a couple more times, but then pulls away. Hopper gives her a look, she throws him a half smile, "It's fine, I need to make sure Will is okay", her voice is strangled slightly. Hopper wants to say more, but knows now is not the right time. Instead, he gives her a small nod, and she moves down the hall towards her room, where Will still sleeps.

Hopper lets out his held breath, as he hears the coffee maker come to a gurgling stop behind him. He quietly opens a nearby cabinet, where he pulls out two new coffee mugs, and he fills them generously with coffee.

He moves and sets them on the kitchen table. Hopper sits down and the chair lets out a soft squeak as his weight bares down on it. He holds his coffee mug tightly in his hand as he stares into the liquid, seeing his own tired reflection within it. He silently begins to contemplate what the next move is.

His thoughts are interrupted though by the shuffling coming back down the hall, he lifts his head to see that Joyce has stopped at Will's room. She peaks her head through the cracks, and a small knowing smile graces her face. She lets out a soft laugh as she turns back towards the kitchen.

Hopper doesn't say a word to her as she sits with her smug grin. She picks up her mug and takes a small sip, when she pulls the object away from her face, she's giving Hopper a teasing stare.

"What!?" he can't help but bark through gritted teeth. And at this reaction, Joyce holds a hand up to her mouth to keep her from laughing too loud, "So much for that threat last night, huh Hopper?" she teases.

Hopper harrumphs at her words as he rolls his eyes, "Wheeler's lucky I didn't murder him in his sleep", he grips his coffee mug a little firmer than need be, his hands burning slightly from the heat, but he honestly didn't care.

Joyce shakes her head at the fuming man, "At least he was a gentleman enough to sleep on top of the covers Hop, I'm sure she asked him up there" she shrugs as she takes another sip of her coffee.

Hopper throws her a questioning look, "What do you mean by that?" Joyce hums as she swallows her drink, turning her gaze towards Hopper, "Mike would have never gone up on that bed if she wasn't the one to ask, I honestly don't think he has a death wish".

"Then why was he up there anyways!" he counters, his voice a bit louder than he meant it to be, and Joyce shoots him a look that says, *keep your voice down*.

Joyce sighs, "Hopper, Mike wants to be on your good side, even if he's ticked off at you. Do you really think that he wants El to be hidden away from him again?" she questions the man.

Hopper continues to fiddle with his coffee mug, "Yeah, well, that might *have* to be the case until I get things figured out".

Joyce sputters a bit at his words, "Hop, you can't keep them apart, it'll kill them" she stresses. And at this Hopper throws her another look, "You think I don't know that!" he growls attempting to keep his voice at bay. "But, I have no idea what's going to happen with the lab, and she needs to stay safe", he raps his fingers onto the wooden surface with his last two words.

She can't help but shake her head at the stubborn man, "Doesn't mean things can't change Hop, that you can't allow Mike and El to see each other *somehow*" her eyes search his own.

Hopper wants to continue to fight with her, to try to come up with a million reasons as to why it's 'not safe' for El to have any interactions with the boys. However, deep down he knows that Mike and the others would do everything in their power to make sure their relationship with El would remain secret until he figured something out.

If he was being honest with himself, though, the real reason behind keeping her locked up in the cabin was because he didn't know how he was going to be able to put up with this new thing that was blossoming before his eyes with his girl and Mike.

And truth be told, he knew that whatever they had, had started way before he even knew El existed. It was there in every moment they shared together. And...Hopper was scared to navigate this road because he thought he was never going to experience it, but for some reason, fate had thrown him another line. Or more so in Hopper's opinion, fate had thrown him something that he could be laughed at for, as he would most likely be flailing around attempted to figure out this whole 'teenage' thing.

Hopper runs his hand through his growing beard once again, huffing. His eyes catch Joyce's, and she's giving him the look of, *you know I'm right*. And he growls into his hand, desperately thinking of how he even ended up in this situation.

He's about to speak again, until he hears soft voices echoing from Will's room, and he startles slightly, he pushes his chair back with a squeak. But, before he gets to stand, a small, fragile hand reaches out to catch his arm. He whips his eyes to Joyce, "Don't start anything, they've got a lot to talk about" she gives him a leveled look.

His eyes move about her face, and then turn towards Will's bedroom door, where their voices can still be heard, but no words can be made out. He huffs again in defeat, as he finally stands. "Let's get breakfast ready then, they'll be hungry getting up".

And at his actions, Joyce gives him a small smile, "There's bread in the cabinet, eggs in the fridge..." she moves to start getting the ingredients together, when Hopper nods at her suggestions, waiting for her to finish, and once she does, he asks, "Got any eggos, in the freezer?"

Hopper and Joyce spend the next half hour cooking up a large portion of eggs, bacon, toast and to Hopper's relief: eggos.

He places the last steaming plate of scrambled eggs on the counter, when Nancy and Jonathan enter the kitchen with wide yawns. Hopper glances up at them as he organizes the table, "Kids sleep alright?"

Both older teens shrug at his question, "Well enough" Nancy sighs as she slumps into the nearest chair, her eyes still heavy with sleep too.

Hopper nods at her answer as he moves towards the hallway, "Uh, Hop", a voice catches him, he turns with a slight annoyance to the woman beckoning him, Joyce gives him a pointed look that says: *don't be too hard on them*. In which he rolls his eyes to, as he slowly approaches the door.

He stops short of opening it, leaning in slightly to catch a glimpse of the two teens, who are now sitting up against the headboard, El's head rests against Mike's shoulder as she snuggles into him. They are talking in a low whisper, in which Hopper still can't make out.

So, he decides to make his presence known. He doesn't even knock as he opens the door, the creaking draws the teens attention away from one another, their eyes widen slightly at Hopper's presence.

He stands with his arms crossed as he leans against the doorframe, he quirked an eyebrow up at the two teens, silently asking them to explain.

At Hopper's look, Mike attempts to shuffle away from El, to allow some distance between themselves on the cramped bed. But, El holds him there firmly with her hand holding him down. She fixes Hopper with a glare.

Hopper huffs at her look as he speaks, "What happened to sleeping on the floor?" his direction is directed at Mike, who opens his mouth to speak, "It was-uh, I-I didn't...w-we didn't..." he desperately sputters, and Hopper is inwardly enjoying the kids fumbling and nervousness.

However, El speaks for him, "I asked", she states plainly, her eyes still not moving from Hopper's. He slowly nods at her answer, "And why did you ask, kid?" he can't help but ask.

"Didn't want to be alone, Mike helps with the nightmares" she answers as she squeezes the boys hand within hers. The boy in question relaxes at her words and stares in awe at her. "I do?" he asks, slightly taken aback.

El turns her head slightly to meet the boys gaze and she gives him a small smile as a blush remnants from her cheeks.

Hopper's eyes flick between the two teens, who have now become wrapped up in one another. He rolls his eyes and lets out a loud cough, startling the teens from their moment, as both of their attention is brought back to him.

"Kid, I'll let it pass this time, but we'll have to have a talk about this later" he says with a gruff voice. He watches as El sighs dramatically, almost very similar to the soap opera stars in those awful shows she watches as she grumbles, "Not more rules".

Hopper can't help but chuckle at her dramatics. She once again makes eye contact with Hopper, "No funny business", she gestures between herself and Mike, and the boys face lights up in embarrassment.

Hopper nods profusely, "There better not have been, kid" and this time he points his finger at Mike, when he says 'kid' Mike's eyes going wide, as he shakes his head at Hopper's words, "Yeah...no...nothing happened...sir" he throws in for good measure.

Hopper does one more look between the two teens, and he knows deep down in his gut that Mike would never do anything to his girl. But, he also knew what went on inside a teenage boys mind, and he wasn't happy thinking of *when* those thoughts would become more

vivid in the young boys mind, and his stomach knotted at the thought.

He shakes his head from those thoughts though as he throws a thumb over his shoulder, "Come on you two, breakfast is ready, I'm sure you're starving" he states.

And at the word 'breakfast', El's face immediately lights up as she asks, "Eggos?" curiously. Both Hopper and Mike can't help but laugh at El's excitement, but Hopper nods and says, "Yeah, kid, there's eggos".

And without another word, El hops out of the bed, and drags Mike behind her, their hands interlaced together. Hopper just barely moves out of the way as he dodges the two teens, he shakes his head at them, but can't help the small smile that grows as he follows them into the kitchen.

Forks and knives scrape against the porcelain plates as silence sits heavy around the table as everyone fills their empty stomachs.

Hopper has just finished his portion as he sits back and sips at his coffee. He works his way around the table, taking in everyone's presence. Nancy and Jonathan had emerged from his room shortly after Mike and El had exited Will's room.

Their expressions weren't as tired as Mike and El's still seemed to be. Will had already been perched at the kitchen table as he greedily filled his stomach. He only stopped when Mike and El approached the table, and introductions between them were made, since, El had never officially met Will.

Both of the kids being the quiet type, they had a short 'hello' between them, as they silently observed one another. However, Hopper could see that there was a lot to be said between them, but, with growling stomachs, now wasn't the right time.

Hopper's eyes then scanned over to Joyce who sat next to him. She slowly picked at her plate only filled with a piece of toast, a handful of scrambled eggs and two pieces of crisped bacon. She had ate some,

but she more so seemed lost in her thoughts than anything. He sighed inwardly knowing the heartbreak she was still going through.

Finally, he turned to the *couple*? His brain seemed to assume who sat to his right. They too, were both eagerly filling their empty stomachs, but, Hopper silently noted the fact that El's right hand and Mike's left hung below the table and never surfaced. He could only guess that their hands were still intertwined, not willing to let go.

He chooses to not say anything on the matter, and just allow this time for everyone to relax. However, the moment does not last long as a knock resonates against the wooden door.

Everyone stops mid movement, and all eyes are wide in uncertainty. No one makes a move to answer the door. But, knowing it will have to be answered eventually, Hopper rises to his feet, now all eyes are on him.

He throws a small look at El, who seems the most nervous out of the rest of them, she has scooted herself closer to the Wheeler boy. Her amber eyes wide in fear.

Hopper clears his throat, "Don't worry, I'm sure it's nothing", he attempts to reassure everyone around the table. He scoots his way behind Joyce, sucking in his gut to move through the narrow space behind her.

Hopper moves towards the door slowly, his hand hovering slightly over the gun. He creeps in front of the peephole about to look through, when another loud knock reverberates against the door and a loud, "Guys, come on, let us in!" echoes from the other side.

He allows himself to let out his held breath, as he moves to unlock the numerous latches and locks from the door. Hopper flings the door open and he's met with the smiling faces of Dustin, Lucas and Max.

"Geez, took you long enough", Dustin states annoyingly, as he goes to move past Hopper. However, the older man throws out his arm to block him, "What are you doing here?" he half whispers to the curly haired kid.

Dustin shrugs his shoulders, "Last night you said we could come by tomorrow....it's tomorrow" he says as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. Hopper rolls his eyes, "I *meant*-" he growls getting closer to the hat wearing teen, "When *I* contacted you" he seethes.

Dustin takes a step back, "Welllll...you never said that" he defends himself and both Lucas and Max nod their heads in agreement.

"We just want to say 'hi' to the others, we want to see if Will's okay" Lucas steps forward. Hopper takes in the sight of the three kids, they have hopeful looks gracing their features. Hopper growls, "Fine, get in here", he opens the door so the teens can step through.

They eagerly enter, and when Max's flash of red hair sneaks by him, Hopper flicks his head this way and that, making sure no one is watching them. Satisfied, Hopper shuts the door, and locks it up tightly once again.

Chaos ensues the moment the last three teens make their way into the kitchen. Their loud greetings and conversations grow into a frenzy very quickly and a headache immediately erupts in Hopper's head.

He enters the kitchen and watches as the kids group together, reconnecting, and asking a million questions about how El and Will were. The two quieter kids of the group seemed widely overwhelmed with the onslaught of questions, so Hopper spoke up, "Hey!" he said a bit more gruff than he meant to. Immediately all eyes were on him, and hush fell over the kitchen.

He lets out a long breath, "Look, kids, I know you are all anxious to talk to El and Will about what happened, but all you need to know is that the gate's closed, and both are safe and sound. *You* are all safe and sound", he looks over the kids as they take in his words.

"El closed the gate, that means the nightmare with the Upside Down is done. These two have gone through a lot, how about in time they can tell you what went on, but for now...just relax, be kids" he shrugs his shoulders to them.

Once he is done with his little speech the kids turn and give each other small smiles. "Yeah, Hopper's right", Dustin nods in agreement, "Hey!" he starts excitedly, all the teens eyes are on him, "Let's teach El some board games, I'm sure she'll love them!" he jumps to his feet.

Lucas nods, "Yeah, I bet Hopper doesn't play any with her" he turns and teases the middle age man, who huffs in return.

El however, speaks up, "We play games...go fish...old maid..." she begins to list off, but she's cut off by Dustin, "What, that's it?!" El seems a bit taken aback by his suddenness.

"Come on El, we've got to teach you a proper board game" he states officially as he begins to stand. "I've got a ton of games in my room, we can play in there" Will stands to move from the table, an excited grin on his face.

Max and Lucas follow behind the two brunettes, Mike begins to stand, however, he hesitates slightly, as he pulls El up with their joined hands. Hopper watches their small interaction.

"We don't have to play if you don't want to, Dustin's just excited is all" Mike explains to the small girl beside him. However, El gives him a gorgeous grin and pulls at Mike, "I want to learn".

And at these words, Mike nods enthusiastically as he pulls El towards Will's bedroom where the others have disappeared to. They move around the table, but El stops in her tracks, halting Mike's movements, he gives her a questioning look. He, however, can see that El's eyes have found Hopper's, he waits.

El stares up to the larger man, he gives her a quizzical look, "Is it okay...to go with my friends" she says delicately to the man, and he's pretty sure he feels his heart break a little. *Is he really that strict?* Crosses his mind, and he panics slightly thinking of just how isolated he kept her, and now re-evaluating the next step was definitely a need be.

But, instead of reacting in a way that will surprise the young girl, who has little contact with the outside world, he places a warm hand on her shoulder, smiles and say, "Have fun". He warms the second her

brilliant smile lights up her face, as she turns to pull Mike into Wills room.

He watches until the door shuts behind him, and he can finally let go of the breath he is holding, as he turns back towards the kitchen, where Joyce, Nancy and Jonathan are picking up after the late breakfast mess.

Hopper in turn slumps against the kitchen table, he groans as he massages his head with his dry and cracked hands.

He feels a gentle hand on his shoulder, he slowly pulls his head away from his hands, as he looks up to Joyce who gives him a tight smile. "How you doin' Hop?" she rubs at his shoulder.

He sighs and shakes his head, "I've got to figure out what this next step is going to be, how am I supposed to keep her safe, but also make sure she has a social life. I can guarantee that these kids, especially Wheeler, won't take 'no' for an answer about seeing her", he grumbles.

"Well-" Joyce starts as she in turn takes a seat next to him as she leans against her knees, "How long does she still need to be hidden for, the labs pretty much done for", she shrugs.

Hopper huffs, "Yeah, just because those demodogs wiped out a good chunk of those mental scientist, doesn't mean that there aren't more hanging around, the damn thing just needs to be shut down".

The running water from Nancy and Jonathan doing the dishes abruptly stops, Nancy turns hesitantly towards the two adults. Hopper immediately catches her suspicious body language, as she throws an uncertain look to Jonathan, who freezes slightly, unsure about Nancy's next motives.

He can't help but question the older Wheeler, "Something on your mind?" he quips at her. She can barely make eye-contact with him, she bites her lip, debating on how to share what she wants to get out.

But, she lets out a long breath, "Uhm...I think we might have already got that covered" she shrugs her shoulders. And at this, Hopper's face

becomes as straight as an arrow, "What do you mean?" he says quickly.

Nancy again turns her glance towards Jonathan, who gives her a motion to continue. "We uh...contacted someone, who might have helped us with writing a story on the lab....one that would avenge Barb's death" she says quietly.

Hopper rises to his feet, "Who did you go to see?" his eyes search her face. "Uh..." she stands silently, folding her arms into herself attempting to disappear. When, Jonathan finally steps in, "It was Murray" he admits.

And Hopper's eyes go wide, "Murray!?" his face begins to redden with anger. "You mean, the guy who thought El was some...Russian spy!" he barks at them.

They both flinch at the intensity of his words. Joyce stands to push back on Hopper's shoulder, "Hop, hear them out" she whispers to him. Hopper allows himself to take in a deep breath, trying to calm himself, he throws the older teens a look that says, *keep going*.

So, Nancy steps in, "I know what you think of him Hopper, but he knows what he's doing, the story had *nothing* to do with El, I promise I would never include her in this" she explains, her voice breaking slightly.

Hopper calms slightly at her words, his stance coming to a more relaxed state, "What did you do then?"

Jonathan jumps in, "We just put a small idea out there, that chemical leaks from the lab, that's what killed Barb" he explains to the man. Hopper slowly nods at the two of them, "So, no mention of El?" his eyes move between them.

Nancy feircly shakes her head, "No. No, definitely not. He asked about her, but I told him what he heard was a misunderstanding...and he seemed to believe me, I mean, all he seemed to care about was just shutting the stupid place down" she finished while shrugging her shoulders.

A quiet fell over the small group, as Hopper went over this new information within his head. *Maybe there was a chance...* echoed through his mind, and he finally felt relieved that things could probably change, that El could finally get the life she deserved.

A smile flickered across his face, he moved quickly, "I've got a call I need to make", he states as he rushes towards the living room to the Byers telephone.

Hopper enters the Byers living room, taking the corded phone with him onto the couch, attempting to leave some privacy for himself. He quickly punches in the number as he listens for the phone to be answered.

An old woman's voice answers on the other end, "Hawkins Hospital, how may I direct you?" Hopper holds his breath as he answers, "Samuel Owens". There is then silence on the other end of the phone until he hears a, "One moment, please" followed by a 'click', as terrible elevators music begins to play.

Hopper grumbles in annoyance, but he doesn't have to listen long as the phone is picked up by a man answering on the other end, "Hello?" the voice sounds tired.

Hopper sighs in relief, "Hey Owens, it's Hopper" he speaks low into the phone. Owens chuckles lightly, "Well, if it isn't the man who saved my life".

"Yeah, well, had to do something for ya", Hopper agrees as he remembers last night, and how he had loaded Owens into his jeep shortly after getting El in. Dropping him off at the emergency exit at the nearest hospital and telling the staff that he had found Owens at his home, apparently attacked by some massive wildlife, and within moments the man was swept off.

"Well-" the man on the other end takes in a long breath, "I really do owe you, Hopper. The doc said I was lucky to be alive, let alone still have a leg left". And at this Hopper smiles, "Actually, Owens, I know you're still recovering, but I do have one favor to ask of you" he speaks quietly into the receiver.

He listens as Owen chuckles through the earpiece, "Hop, you name it, I'll have it done" he says firmly. Hopper smiles widely at this declaration, "Okay then Owens, I'll hold you to it" and with that Hopper explains his idea, and situation. At the end, Owens laughs one more time and says, "Give me some time, I'll be sure to have it done as soon as I can, and once it's done, I'll be in contact" he states.

Hopper lets out a steady breath, "You've got no idea how much this'll mean to her Owens" he shakes his head, but then something strikes him, "In the meantime, what about some limited contact, for El and her friends?"

After hanging up with Owens, Hopper finds himself a bit more prepared, and relieved, knowing he has a next step, he has something that may work out for the kid. He returns to the kitchen, Joyce throws him a questioning look, "What's with the smile?" she pokes at him, and he just meerley shakes his head, as he sits back down at the kitchen table, basking in the moment of slight success.

The day drags on, and Hopper can hear the kids in Wills room, shouting in excitement and laughing together. In all honesty, Hopper is glad that El is getting this kind of interaction, for, it seems like it was never going to get to this point, but he's sure El is elated at this time spent with her close friends.

Just as 5 o'clock rolls around, Will emerges from the room, he approaches his mom and Hopper at the kitchen table. Joyce throws him a look, "What's up bud?"

Will moves from side to side on his feet, "Uhm, we were just wondering, we're getting kind of hungry, can we order pizza?" his eyes are hopeful and pleading, silently hoping his mom is going to say yes.

Joyce gives her youngest son a knowing smile, she turns to Hopper, "Only if this guy's willing to chip in" she pats his shoulder lightly. And he can't help but let out a long breath, "Yeah, okay, what do you kids-" but as soon as he begins to ask for toppings, the other five teens come busting out of Will's room, shouting a variety of toppings, "Pepperoni!", "Olives!", "Pineapple!", are thrown at him like small

bombs, and he braces himself at their outbursts.

When a tiny voice breaks through their onslaught, "What's pizza?", the youngest girl asks, as she stands beside Mike. And Hopper notes that their hands are *still* intertwined together. He rolls his eyes at the fact, however, the attention is no longer on him, and all the teens stare wide eyed at the small girl.

"You don't know what pizza is?" Lucas asks incredulously, in which El shakes her head, looking down at her feet, feeling uncomfortable. "What the hell Hopper, you never brought her home pizza?" Dustin stares wildly at the middle age man, who only shrugs, "Never thought of it I guess".

"It's a kids *right of passage!*" He shouts throwing his hands in the air. Hopper shakes his head at the dramatic boy, "Alright, alright, I guess we will even see if she *likes* pizza" Hopper tells the teens who stand about.

He turns his attention to the shy girl, "What do you want for a topping, El?" he asks her. She gives him a confused look, he's about to explain to her what he means, but Wheeler beats him to it. "It's like what goes on top of it" he explains with enthusiasm, and El's light up as he speaks.

"So, it's basically a flat bread, topped with a tomato sauce, then cheese, and then people add other toppings to that" he explains, and her eyes go wide, "Eggs?" she asks, he own excitement growing.

Hopper casts a look at the Wheeler boy, and he wants to laugh at the contemplation that goes across the poor boys face, for, he knows he doesn't want to crush the girls enthusiasm, and he doesn't want to hurt her feelings either. But, he can also tell he's trying to not gag, at her request. He can't help but let out a small laugh.

However, Mike seems to catch himself, "Uhm, you probably could...it's not a usual topping for pizza-" and at this Hopper sees El's face fall slightly, but Mike tugs at her hand to look at him, and he smiles brightly, "Why don't we do a plain cheese, and then you can add eggos here?" he suggests. And at this, El's smile is bright once again, as she simply nods her head in agreeance.

Hopper shakes his head at the interaction, he has to give it to Wheeler, for he definitely has a way with being delicate and caring towards the girl. And definitely the patience he usually doesn't have.

Once Hopper has all of the kids orders, he makes a call to the pizzeria, and an hour later, he's carrying in six pizza's to the Byers home.

The teens swarm him like a fly to trash, and he has to bark at them to 'get out of the way, or you won't get *any*' and they then calm themselves down enough to move so Hopper can place the pizzas onto the counter.

They attack the food like it was their last meal. He watches them with somewhat disdain. However, his attention is immediately drawn to Wheeler and El, as they stand off to the side each holding their own plates, waiting for their friends to finish their attack before even attempting to move in, not risking wanting to lose an arm or something.

He watches, as Mike stands close to El, whispering into her ear as he points to each pizza, he assumes he is explaining the toppings to the girl. Her eyes follow his pointed hand as she takes in the sight before her. He watches as her smile grows, listening to the Wheeler boy as if he was God himself.

She nods as she listens, attentive. And Hopper silently wonders how this connection between them began. The simplicity behind Mike's movements and soft words, seemed the perfect match for El to absorb his every word. While El's quiet but strong demeanor allows Mike to step out of his shell, and show off his kind and caring self.

He gazes at the two teens, as the rest of their friends have moved to the living room to eat. Mike places a slice of cheese and pepperoni onto her plate. "The basic" he explains to her, and she nods with a wide smile.

They too, move to the living room to join their friends. Hopper follows them. Will, Lucas and Dustin have taken up the couch, while Max sits in the lone armchair, her feet tucked up underneath her. Mike and El sit next to each other on the floor sitting in front of the

coffee table. El moves as she picks up her first slice of pizza. And suddenly, everyone stops eating, and their eyes lock onto El.

She gives them a tentative smile as she brings the pizza to her mouth. He watches her as she takes a bite and chews thoroughly. And, as expected, her face lights up, and when she swallows she says, "That's really good", and her friends cheer.

They chat idly as they chew on their pizza, exchanging short stories from their school days or from moments from the past. And Hopper realizes that within this moment: they are finally kids again.

His eyes fall onto the girl whom has been apart of his life for the last year. She has eagerly finished her first slice of pizza and is moving onto the piece with pepperoni, her eyes light up even more with this piece. She devours it quickly.

When she gets towards the end, sauce has found its way onto her mouth. He silently hopes that she doesn't reach to wipe it with the sleeve of the sweatshirt she still wears. He's about to go get her a napkin, when suddenly, Wheeler turns towards her and notices the blemish on her face. He grabs his own napkin and wipes the spot clean.

The teens eyes lock for a moment, as he gently moves the napkin against her delicate skin. He watches in wonder as both of their faces light up red. Mike moves his hand downward, as he watches El mouth a "Thank you" to him. Mike ducks his head, but then he gives her a smile, they are close to each other, *too close*, his dad instincts kick in slightly.

The other teens around them are too distracted by an exuberant story Dustin is sharing to notice the two on the floor growing closer to each other. He watches as their lips part slightly, as Mike bends down, and El tilts her head up, their nose just barely touch when the dad in him decides to speak up, "So, how's the pizza, El?" he makes his presence known, and the two teens jump apart, and the others attention is now on the two on the floor. Both of their faces are etched with disappointment.

"Yeah, which did you like better, El?" Will questions. El ponders the

question for a moment, but then hums in delight as she answers, "Pepperoni, definitely" she grins.

And the others let out either cheers of approval or faces of disgust. They continue to mingle together, when Nancy pokes her head around the corner, "Hey, Mike, mom just called, we've gotta get going soon" she says, biting her lip, knowing that his reaction won't be pretty.

Mike let's out a huff in annoyance, "It's the weekend, can't we just stay here again?" he stresses. But, Nancy shakes her head, "Sorry Mike, I think mom knows something is up, she wants us home", she then turns to Lucas and Dustin, "I guess your moms want you home too" she says to them, and they let out noises of disappointment as well.

"But-" Mike tries again, his face filled with dread. And this is when Hopper decides to step in, "We've got to get going too, I still need to shower, and we need to get El back to the cabin" he directs this to the girl sitting on the floor, her mouth immediately turns into a frown.

Hopper's words seem to trigger something in Mike because he stands quickly, "So, what, is this the last time we can see El?" he throws out, anger dancing with his words.

The room falls silent as everyone looks between the love sick teen and the protective guardian, debating on who will win this argument. Dustin breaks the awkward tension, "Oh geez, we're out of pizza, come on guys!" he bristles as he stands as quickly as he can, Lucas, Max and Will on his heels following him back into the kitchen. Leaving Hopper and Mike in a stare down, while El flicks her head between the two, scared about what either of them are going to say to one another.

Hopper desperately wants to lash out at the mouthy teen, but, in all honesty, there's finally a plan in place, and he's sure everyone will be on board with it...eventually. So, instead of yelling, he decides to play a different game.

"So, what kid? Everytime something doesn't work out in your favor, you're going to throw a fit?" he fires back with a little more intensity

than he originally meant to. Mike's face grows somewhat warm, but he rolls his fingers into his palm, tightening them into fists. He wasn't going to lose this battle. "It just seems like everytime you step in...El gets taken away again. And what, how long are we going to have to wait this time, two years?!" he throws a glare at Hopper.

"You *know* how much pain that separation caused us!" Mike growls gesturing between himself and El. "I *won't* be kept away from her *this* time" he says through gritted teeth as he comes to stand before Hopper.

They both glare at one another, daring the other to speak. Hopper stares down at the kid, and he can't help remark how much he has grown, coming to stand just a couple inches below him. The love sick teen doesn't back down.

Hopper then relaxes his body and takes in a breath, "Well, kid, if you'd actually let me explain the situation, you might not get so heated about it". He watches Wheeler take in his words, and the teens demeanor falters slightly, "What do you mean?" he inquires.

"Are you going to let me explain, and *not* jump down my throat?" he questions the boy. Mike searches his face, not wanting to relent, but then he hears a soft voice behind him, "Mike", he turns quickly to the source. El stands beside him, and she intertwines her hand with his and gives him a soft smile. This act seems to immediately calm the teen, as his body relaxes at her words. "Let him talk" she states to him. He seems to contemplate her words slightly, but he can't help but obey her commands. So, he slowly nods and comes to sit with her on the couch.

Hopper watches the interaction and is silently impressed by the way El can calm the boy. He starts to believe he might have nothing to worry about this boy, knowing that El has him wrapped around her little finger.

The teens stare up at him, waiting for him to explain. So, he starts, "Look, I've got a plan that has already been started, and it has something to do with lab getting shut down and El being able to go out" he explains slowly, and at his words, the teens lean into his words, he can see the shock growing on both of their faces.

He holds up a hand though, making sure they know not to get too excited, "However, I don't know how long it will take, I'm hoping sooner rather than later" he says delicately. And he watches as El hangs her head, her curly hair hiding her face, but he makes out her next words, "Don't like the word 'soon'" she mutters.

And Hopper heaves a heavy sigh, he bends down to her level, attempting to get her to look at him. "Hey kid" he tries, but she shakes her head, he can tell she's upset. He huffs, not being the best in consoling her when she gets to this point.

However, it seems he doesn't have to, when he watches as the Wheeler boy places a gentle arm around her shoulder, and he gives her a tight squeeze. She turns her head to face the boy, and all he does is give her a warm smile, and this brings her back before going off the deep end. Hopper honestly can't believe what he just watched, his gut pains slightly at the jealousy he now has for this boy to easily console his girl.

He shakes this from his mind, though, as El turns her head, directing her attention back to him. He gives her a grateful smile, as he reaches forward and rubs at her curls, she laughs at the affection. "I know you don't like the word 'soon' kid, but there's something else that comes with this instead" he explains, and both teens give him a questioning look.

"I've gotten the go ahead to let you two be able to talk to one another-but, only through Mike's supercom" he allocates.

"But, El doesn't have a supercom" Mike states sadly, and Hopper rolls his eyes, "I'll get her one kid, and I'll let you know when you two can talk", he explains.

The teens seems to contemplate his words, as they pause for a moment, to his surprise, El breaks it, "What about *seeing* each other?" she asks with hopeful eyes. And his stomach drops, knowing that he knew this question was going to come.

He sighs, "That's where you guys are going to have to compromise and be patient, if I get the okay, then I'll definitely let it happen, alright?" his eyes flick between each of the teens. He knows that this

is not the answer they were both looking for, but, it's the best he can offer them so far.

"Snowball?" is El's next question, and he hears Mike gasp beside her, his attention fully on her. "You...still want to go....with me?" he asks in disbelief, and El gives him a small smile, nodding at his question.

This then sends Mike's mouth into overdrive, as it widens in absolute joy, "That would be amazing" he sighs, his eyes only for the girl next to him.

Hopper, however, rolls his eyes, "This again, I thought you dropped it?" his question aimed for the girl, who now shoots him a look, "Promised", is what she says. And he knows immediately that Mike had promised to take her to the snowball last year, and she intended to keep that promise.

Hopper lets out another long breath, "I know kid, and *I* promise, I'll try my best to get you there with Wheeler, okay?" he says in a gentle voice, desperately trying to display to El that he *would* get her to the snowball one way or another.

She scans his face with her wide, amber eyes, attempting to make sure to see that there was no lie beneath his words. And she must have trusted his look, when she relaxes and nods to the man.

Hopper sighs in relief, "Thanks kids, I know this won't be easy, but we'll get there, you'll see". And both teens nod to the chief, as they slump against the couch, El's head resting on the boys shoulder, relaxing in the last couple of minutes they have together.

At this time, Hopper decides to give them a moment alone, while he gathers up the others, so he moves into the kitchen. He can see that they've all been talking quietly to each other, and their conversations fall short when they spot his large frame enter the kitchen.

"Come on kids, load up the truck and we'll get you home" he states, as he waves his hands to usher the kids out. They all groan, but shuffle idly about, picking up the last of their things, and head towards the living room.

They are now all standing about outside, each of the teens exchanging small goodbyes with one another. Will, Lucas, Dustin and Max had just heard of the rule about talking to El, and they aren't exactly happy about the situation, however, when El states it's a 'compromise' they seem to accept it and move on.

Dustin, Max and Lucas cram into the back of Hopper's tight cruiser, while El and Mike snuggly share the passenger seat, however, neither seemed to care. Especially as they snuggled into each other, El laying her tired head against Mike's shoulder, as he rests his head against hers.

Hopper rolls his eyes at their interaction, but chooses this moment to ignore it as he revs his engine to life, and pulls out of the Byers driveway.

Max and Dustin are his first drop offs, the others wave goodbye to them as they head towards Lucas's house. Mike and El have moved to the back seat now, even though the ride is a short one to Mike's. Hopper gazes into the rearview mirror, and he sees that El is attempting to hide her tear streaked face from Mike, she wipes away her tears quickly and sniffles slightly.

He pulls into the Wheeler's driveway, and he turns towards the teens in the back, in which he can tell now that both of them are attempting to not cry, but failing miserably. They are looking back and forth between one another, both wanting to exchange words, but they feel the awkwardness weighing heavy in the air with Hopper in the car.

So, instead of fighting the inevitable, Hopper flicks a hand at the two of them, "El, you can walk him to the door to say goodbye, just don't linger too long, okay?" and at this both teens gasp in surprise, but he can see their elated faces in the rearview mirror, and pats himself on the back for the small success.

They both hop out of the small truck, Mike moving towards his house, while Hopper notices El is hesitating slightly, her eyes narrow at Hopper. He gets her silent message, he rolls his eyes and turns his head the opposite way of where he *could* have a straight shot to the Wheeler's front door.

He waves a hand at her, "Don't worry kid, I won't watch" he grumbles, as he peaks over slightly catching her smiling face as she closes the door behind her, as she rushes to catch up with Mike.

And, true to his word, he keeps his head turned away from the two teens, his head was in a silent battle between honestly not wanting to watch whatever interaction they were having and wanting to turn and make sure Wheeler wasn't trying anything with his girl.

But, the beast inside him grows smaller this time, as he desperately tries to ignore its pestering presence. He gives the kids five minutes, and he casts a look over at them and he can see that they are locked in a tight embrace, just holding one another.

And in this moment, Hopper knows that a lot more will come and evolve from this moment once El gets her freedom. He begins to predict the future of when the two teens relationship becomes more. Where he will probably be picking up El here on nights she has spent all day hanging out. Where she will be picking her up from their dates. To seeing their love grow.

He sighs, hopelessly praying that what he sees in the Wheeler boy is true: that he is a honest kid who only wants the best for El. And for right now, he is going to believe it, because, the not so little girl he decided to take in was just as hopelessly in love with the boy. The road ahead would definitely be long.

Hopper watches as they break apart, their faces sadden once again. He watches as El silently steps up on her tiptoes and places a gentle kiss on the boys cheek. She gives him one last smile, as she moves down the steps. Their intertwined hands holding on, slowly slipping away until they can no longer hold on.

El walks to Hopper's vehicle backwards, as Mike stands on the porch, both of their eyes not leaving the other. El finally reaches the vehicle, and she opens the door, her head immediately turning back to gaze longingly at Mike, as he does the same. Hopper revs the engine once again and backs out the Wheeler's driveway. El doesn't take her eyes off of the Wheeler's home until it is no longer in sight. And once it is, she begins to silently cry, and Hopper's heart breaks.

He panics slightly, but reaches out a comforting hand to the saddened girl, she takes it willingly, giving it a tight squeeze. He sighs, "Kid, I really do promise this time, soon, will be soon", she doesn't answer as she sniffles, trying to hold back her tears.

"I know" she whispers through her watery breath, she turns to look at him with genuine trust embedded within her smile, and Hopper relaxes at her look.

They sit in silence for a while, allowing the night to pass them by as they head towards the cabin. Hopper glances over at the girl once again, and she catches his look, she gives him a questioning look, "So", he asks, wanting to pick on the girl a little bit, "Did he kiss you?" he gives her a teasing look.

And at his words El gasps besides him as she leans over and smacks his arm, "Hopper!" she growls at him. And he can't help but let out a barking laugh as they continue down the road. "You said you weren't watching!" she throws at him.

He continues to laugh, "I didn't actually, but you just confirmed that he *did*!" he throws his head back, in which El growls at the man, as her face lights up red, and she crosses her arms over her chest, huffing in return.

"No fair" she comments as she turns away from the still laughing man. As El, even though slightly ticked at the man, can't help but smile to herself at his charm and silently thanks the stars for allowing to amazing men to have come into her life.

Phew! Another long one! Much longer than anticipated, but I loved writing this, and I can't wait to start on the next chapter! However, I do need to do Stranger Tides first. I just love writing from this new perspective and it's very refreshing! Hope you are all enjoying it as well!

Let me know what you thought by leaving a REVIEW, please! I adore them and have loved every single last one you all left for the previous chapters, it truly is a writers fuel!

Till the next chapter!

4. The Morning After(Mileven)

All I can say is WOW, again, on the outpour of AMAZING comments and reviews on this story! It's absolutely amazing and I'm SO HAPPY all you wonderful readers really like where this story is going! I'm also having a lot of fun writing it as well!

So, here's the next chapter!

Chapter 2.2: The Morning After (Mileven's POV).

It's incredibly rare that the nightmares don't creep into her usual nightly dreams. Her dreams usually consist of the anguish cry of the demogorgon, where the world is decaying around her. And the worst is the fact that Mike is usually there too, and she can never save him in time. She usually wakes in a cold sweat, screaming into the night, while Hopper sits at her side, desperately trying to awake her from her fit.

She then usually spends the rest of the night in a fitful sleep, scared of closing her eyes and having the images of a dead Mike or the demogorgon synged into her retinas.

The nights that she has a restful sleep are rare, and are usually filled with dreams of nothingness. And this sometimes hurts her more, wishing that somewhere deep within her brain a sweet dream might manifest behind her closed eyelids. Where she can escape the realms of reality, just for a minute.

It seems that this wish had finally been granted upon the girl. For, as she falls to sleep beside the boy she had desperately yearned to see, her dreams, for once were filled with a very alive Mike, and her friends, basked in a warm glow. Even though she couldn't fully put into place as to what her dream was about, to actually feel at ease within her dream state calmed El immensely.

Her body seemed to bask in the deep sleep she was getting, however, a loud crash that echoed through the house startled her awake. She jolted slightly forward, her eyes opening widely, her head moving in all directions taking in the unfamiliar surroundings.

She could feel her heartbeat begin to rise, as panic began to set in. However, a stirring beside her brought her back to where she was. She cast her amber eyes to her right, and her body immediately relaxed as she saw who was laying beside her. His curly black hair was splayed in a million different directions, and it was slightly matted down do to it still being a little wet when he went to bed.

El sighed, as she moved herself back down onto the bed slowly, her eyes never leaving Mike's face. She could still feel the tiredness that swept through her body, but, she was too mesmerized by Mike's face that she couldn't close her eyes.

Instead of sleeping, she decided to take this moment to *really* look at Mike, and how much he has changed. Even though she had the advantage of being able to check up on him through the void, the brief moments she was able to see him, didn't allow her to truly see his changes.

The first thing that El discovered was the fact that: Mike was tall. And she smiled to herself at this fact. She secretly liked the fact that when he looked down at her, she noticed the soft look that would grace his features. And when he pulled her into a warm embrace, she enjoyed the fact that his larger body seemed to engulf her, allowing her to feel safe and warm.

She analyzed his sleeping face, and gently smiled as she was close enough to count each and every freckle that dotted his nose and cheeks. And just as her hair had grew, his seemed to grow in a million different directions, she cherished that similarity.

But, what really surprised her was how much more *grown*, he seemed to her. Hopper had explained to the young girl one day when she noticed a pair of shoes were too tight to fit her feet in. Hopper had chuckled and said "*Guess you're going through a growth spurt, we'll have to get you a new pair*". The word *growth* had piqued her interest, in which launched Hopper into a full explanation as to how people grow, kids her age especially, the fact had astounded her because it was something she had never thought about.

With the new information, however, she took it in stride and attempted to guess as to how big she would grow to. And, as Hopper

had explained, her face would change and she would notice her body changing too. When she had asked how, Hopper got all red faced and said *"That'll be a discussion for another time"* before he left her, reeling with her own thoughts.

Now that she was laying beside Mike, she finally understood what Hopper meant. Her eyes moved around his face as she noticed how much finer his face seemed to be, he looked older. She couldn't help a small blush that crossed her cheeks as she admired the boy beside her.

He snored softly, his mouth was slightly open, and she could feel his breath tickling her face. She giggled quietly, and she felt a sudden urge to reach out and touch his face. So, without even thinking about it, El tentatively reached out her hand and moved it slowly towards Mike's face.

Her eyes moved wildly, as she watched the boy, her fingers just barely making contact with his soft skin, she moved them gently, stroking at his cheek. And at her touch, she was pretty sure she saw Mike's body relax as his breath became softer as she continued to stroke his skin.

She was too absorbed in what she was doing that, she hadn't noticed Mike's eyes starting to open just a crack. In which eventually turned into full blinks, as he attempted to figure out why he was feeling so relaxed in this moment.

His question was soon answered as his eyes fell on the girl laying beside him, her eyes focused on his face. He became aware of the fact that her hand was outstretched stroking his cheek. His mouth began to pull into a smile, and this act finally caught the attention of El, whose eyes flickered up, and met his own.

She seems startled, her mouth opening slightly at being caught, but Mike sighs in return, and greets her with a full blown smile, "Hey", he whispers tiredly to her. And his words seem to mellow the girl out because she gives him a smile in return as she pulls her hand away shyly.

El ducks her head away, her shyness enveloping her as she whispers a

quick, "Sorry", not willing to meet Mike's eyes. And at this one word, Mike tenses, his arm is still wrapped protectively around her waist, which normally he'd be a blushing storm about, but this time, he wants this amazing girl to feel comfortable. So, he pulls her towards him, this surprises her, as she brings up both of her hands, and places them delicately on his chest. She looks up at him with wide eyes.

Mike's dark orbs search her face, and he smiles gently as he bends to connect their foreheads, "You have nothing to be sorry for El, I, uh, I liked it" he chuckled slightly. And with his words, El relaxes in his grip, and she smiles up at him. "Just wanted to...feel you" her words now bring a blush to his face.

He nuzzles his nose lightly with hers and she laughs too. They lay in silence, just embracing this moment together, when Mike opens his mouth to speak, "How'd you sleep?" he whispers to the girl.

At this, El smiles brightly, "Really good, no nightmares" she sighs in relief. Mike throws her a quizzical look as he sits up slightly, raising himself up on his left elbow. "Nightmares?" he asks. And the girl copies Mike's movements as she raises herself up too, however, she pulls herself up more and leans back against the headboard, a small frown now playing on her face.

Mike moves to sit against the headboard too, his head still turned towards the girl beside him. He reaches out and intertwines their hands together, he gives her small hand a tight squeeze. "You can talk to me about them...if you want" he hurriedly throws in, just to make sure she feels comfortable enough talking to him.

El merely shrugs her shoulders as she lets out a long, sad breath, "Nightmares, almost every night" she says quietly. Mike's eyes watch her, waiting for her to continue. "Usually about demogorgon, sometimes lab and..." she hesitates. But Mike gives her hand another squeeze in which she turns her now watery eyes on him, "You...dead", her voice quavers. Mike's heart breaks right then and there as he hears her explanation.

A silent tear falls from her eyes, and she snuffles slightly, she's really trying to not break down and cry.

"El", Mike whispers quietly, as he quickly throws an arm around her shoulder, he pulls her close to him, as she rests her head against his shoulders, her tears falling freely now. Mike rubs her shoulders and plays with her fingers that are intertwined with his.

"You know...I had nightmares too" he says just above a whisper, and El pulls her head away from him just enough to see his face. "Really?" she says with a watery voice. Their eyes meet again, and now Mike's are filling with tears too. He nods his head once, "Yeah, and...they sucked...they were almost always about the night at the school, and how you were...just...gone" his voice warbles as he swallows harshly, holding back his sob.

El's face softens at his words, she tucks her head underneath his chin as she moves so that she can clutch at his shirt, Mike moves his arm so that it wraps around the both of them. They hold onto each other as they cry silently, "Don't like nightmares" she says through her tears. She feels Mike nod above her, "Yeah, me either" he said as he held her close. Both feeling the sadness, the fear, the uncertainty that was held before them for so long. Both of them in agonizing pain, over the events that they both experienced.

They eventually settle down, their eyes drying from their watery sadness. El is the one now idly playing with their fingers. Mike silently smiles as he watches the girl play with his fingers. "Why are your fingers so long?" she asks him out of the blue.

Mike chuckles, as he temporarily pulls his hands away from El's and holds his hand up like he is going to give her a 'high five', but he says, "Hold your hand out, like this" he motions with his hand. El gives him a quizzical look, but obeys as she copies his movements, holding her hand out to his. Mike moves his hand so that his and El's are resting against one another. His fingers stick up a couple centimeters above hers, she giggles. "I think it's just because you have small hands" Mike jokes to the girl, and she rolls her eyes at him. "But, *why?*" she stresses, looking at him as if he has all the answers in the world.

Mike shrugs, "It's usually that way between a boy and a girl, boys tend to have bigger hands" he attempts to explain. "We just grow differently is all" he finishes, as he looks to the girl to see if he has

somewhat answered her question.

But a frown still holds onto her face, "Grow...different between boy and girl?" she says, her eyes looking towards him. He's not sure at first as to if she's asking him a question, but the look on her face tells him that she's looking for an answer.

His face immediately blushes, his mouth falls open, and he only comes up with "Uhhhm-" truly not sure as to how to answer her question, yet she sits there, waiting for his answer.

Instead, he takes in a deep breath and moves his hand so that his fingers fold neatly into hers, she follows his lead, their hands clasping together. "There are just things about boys and girls that are different El, a-and I think you should ask an adult about those questions" he says lamely.

El scrunches her face, "I asked Hopper, he was weird about it" she states. Mike nods his head, "Maybe Joyce, or even Nancy, they'd talk to you about it", he gives her a small smile. He watches as she contemplates his words, as he silently hopes and prays that this is a good enough answer for him.

Finally, El sighs, and nods her head, "Okay, I will" she gives him a little grin. "Oh, but maybe sometime when it's just the two of you...okay?" he asks uncertain if she understands, but she surprises him with another nod, agreeing.

He breathes a sigh of relief, thankful that he didn't need to go into *that* conversation, and he mentally puts it on his radar to ask Nancy or Joyce to fill El in on this particular topic. Anxious to move on from this topic, Mike lays back against the headboard, El mimicking his motions, as she lays her head back on his shoulder.

Mike internally can't believe how lucky he is to have this kind of interaction with a girl, but not any girl, he flicks his eyes down to her curly hair and his heart swells just looking at her. He thinks about how they met, and all they have been through to get to this point. It amazes him that they've gotten this far.

But, what makes Mike smile the most is the fact that this girl actually

likes him, Mike, the nerd of a lifetime. It was something that he couldn't wrap his teenage brain around. Because, if he was being honest with himself, he wasn't sure that during all of his daydreams that he had thought of them reuniting, he didn't know if she knew what *this* was. He was afraid that she wouldn't understand, that it would be him off to the side, silently yearning for her.

However, Mike was proved immediately wrong the second she walked through the Byers door last night. The look on her face when she saw him, that warm embrace, and her desperation for him to know that she had listened for him, that it wasn't *her* choice for not saying anything.

And when they had to say goodbye, he knew that she was leaning up to kiss him. Which, honestly, surprised him because *she* was the one who was making the first move. He was pretty sure his heart almost beat out of his chest.

Then, last night when she had asked him for a kiss, he's pretty sure his heart stopped at her words. To *finally* be able to place his lips on her gentle ones was like a dream come true. He had had a deep desire to kiss her the moment she walked in through the Byers door, but obviously refrained due to the many people around them and with the fact of not wanting to take her off guard.

But, all that fear seemed to go out the window when he saw her lean up to him, when she asked *him* to kiss *her*, when she seemed honestly annoyed that she had been interrupted twice by their two almost kisses. And she had actually *liked* the fact that he had kissed her last year in the cafeteria. He could probably die right now and be eternally happy. However, that was his last wish to have happen because right now he was curled up with the most amazing girl in the world, and wouldn't trade it for everything.

However, the thought of what came with what he silently hoped would be more kissing and hand holding, came the next step of asking him to be his girlfriend. *Should he do it now? Maybe it's too soon, maybe we should take it slow...*" echoed through his head.

And as if El could hear his loud thoughts beside her, she broke the silence, "I hope I can get out of the cabin soon" she mutters quietly.

Her statement confuses him slightly in the fact that she pulls it out of the blue. "What do you mean?" he asks her.

He feels El shrug into him, "Just...don't want to be alone, want to be with you", her words are earnest and Mike feels himself deflate slightly, he honestly didn't know *what* was going to happen next. His anxiety swirled within the depths of his stomach, he squeezes El's hand tighter, "It doesn't matter, I'll make sure Hopper knows we aren't to be kept apart" his voice is firm.

El tightens her grip within his hand, a silent agreement, he's about to open his mouth to speak again, but he is interrupted by the door to Will's room squeaking open, both Mike and El's heads whip towards the door in surprise. Being caught up with each other, both have forgotten where they were.

Their eyes both widen, as they lay their gazes on Hopper who stands with his arms crossed, as he leans against the doorway. He quirked an eyebrow up at both of them.

Mike, feeling the intensity of Hopper's look, attempts to create space between them, but he doesn't get very far, the bed only being a twin. However, at his sudden movements, he feels an arm drape across his midsection, she holds him firmly in place, so he stops his movements.

He wants to say something to both of them, but no words are able to form in his mind. He turns his head to El, who is fixing the older man with a glare. This pushes Hopper to speak, "What happened to sleeping on the floor?" his words are directed at Mike, who, hears Hopper's words, but he feels that his throat has become incredibly dry.

He attempts to speak, "It was-uh, I-I didn't...w-we didn't..." he desperately sputters, honestly not having any real words form within his brain. He swears he catches a hint of a smile cross Hopper's face at his fumbling.

However, El comes to his rescue as speaks and says, "I asked", she states plainly, her eyes still not moving from Hopper's. Hopper evaluates her and gives a slow nod "And why did you ask, kid?" he shifts slightly at the door frame.

"Didn't want to be alone, Mike helps with the nightmares" El answers as she squeezes Mike's hand within hers. Mike feels his body relax instantly at her words and he can't help but stare at her in awe. Words finally make it to his brain as he asks, "I do?"

El turns her head slightly to meet Mike's gaze and she gives him a small smile as a blush remnants from her cheeks. He can feel the blush spreading on his face, feeling incredibly blessed to have this girl in his life.

They become lost within each other's deep brown eyes, they search deep within their orbs, melting into their own little world. However, it doesn't last long as a loud cough startles them and breaks their moment. Mike and El's attention is back on Hopper.

He points a finger in El's direction, "Kid, I'll let it pass this time, but we'll have to have a talk about this later" his voice is gruff. Mike listens as El sighs dramatically beside him as she grumbles, "Not more rules".

Hopper chuckles at the girl. And she surprises them both with her next words, "No funny business", she explains as gestures between the two of them, Mike feels his face light up in embarrassment even more.

Mike turns his head back to Hopper who is nodding profusely, as another finger points itself directly at himself, his eyes widen "There better not have been, kid" the statement is almost a warning, as Mike shakes his head quickly, "Yeah...no...nothing happened...sir" he throws in for good measure.

Hopper looks between Mike and El one more time, Mike contemplates what the older man is thinking. However, Hopper shakes his head and throws a thumb over his shoulder, "Come on you two, breakfast is ready, I'm sure you're both starving" he states.

Mike feels his stomach grumble at the word 'breakfast' he had almost forgotten that he hadn't eaten in almost a full day, and now it was the first thing on his mind. El straightens beside him as she says "Eggs?" in a curious and eager voice. And at this both Mike and Hopper can't help but laugh at El's excitement, but Hopper nods and

says, "Yeah, kid, there's eggos".

And without another word, Mike feels El's pull on his hand, as her hand was still entangled with hers, and before he knows it, he is all but dragged off the bed by a very eager El. He's pretty sure if he was on the other side of the bed, he would have face planted. But since he was getting pulled across the bed, he had time to stable himself as El pulled him through Will's door, as they slipped by Hopper.

El had forgotten her hunger, Mike's presence eliminating all her other feelings. But, with Hopper's mention of 'breakfast' and 'eggos' her stomach immediately reminded her that she was absolutely *starving*. Her elation made her feet think first as she jumped off the bed, her hand still grasped with Mike's, so her bound made it so he followed her off the bed in a hurry.

She dragged the poor boy behind her, however, he obediently trailed behind her. El whipped her head back to the boy, who was giving her a warm smile, in which made El's heart swell. Her bare feet pad into the unfamiliar kitchen, where Joyce and Will were sitting at the table.

Her eyes flit up from the table, and she smiles when she sees El and Mike enter the kitchen. She stands and moves towards them. "Good to see you kids up, how are you doing?" she questions them.

El, suddenly becoming a little shy, smiles bashfully and tucks her head away. And as if Mike can sense her hesitation he answers for her, "We're good Mrs. Byers, just *really* hungry" he states. El feels Mike's hand squeeze her own, and El turns her head up to Mike throwing him a thankful smiley, which he dopely returns.

And in that moment, El feels the warmth and affection that resonates from the boy beside her. It's the feeling that she has felt since day one of meeting the dark haired boy. It's the whole reason why she decided to accept his jacket and follow him, Dustin and Lucas back home. His smooth, comforting voice was nothing El had ever heard before, and it stirred something inside her that she had never felt before. And over time El had learned what this boy had helped her learn: trust.

He was the first person she had truly trusted, and that's why his freckled face seemed to hold a special place within her heart. She's lost in her thoughts, when she feels Mike nudge her side, her eyes flick up to his, he grins, "Come on, let's sit and eat" he nods to the table.

But, before they sit, Will looks up at the both of them, he gives a faint smile. "Hey Will, how are you feeling?" Mike asks with a genuine concern. The boy merely shrugs and says a quick, "Good", as his eyes move to El, both of their eyes widen. Mike sees their reaction, and smiles, "Oh, Will, by the way, this is El" he gestures to the girl, who only gives a small 'hello', in which Will shyly returns. El stands close to Mike's side and he squeezes her hand once again, "Let's eat", he says again with a smile.

El doesn't argue as Mike pulls her towards two chairs, and she watches in awe, as Mike pulls at one of the old wooden chairs, the legs scraping against the floor, he gestures to seat. "Here ya go" he says a bit bashfully, and El feels her mouth open in shock, as he has just copied one of her favorite scenes from her favorite soap. In that moment, El doesn't feel like she could be any luckier. Her face lights up in a gorgeous smile, as she scoots into the chair, and Mike skillfully pushes the chair in as she sits.

Once she is tucked into the table, Mike sits beside her, and she immediately grasps for his hand. Mike seems surprised and he quirks an eyebrow at her, not that he honestly minds at the contact. El blinks her teary eyes at Mike, which seems to startle him, "El, are you okay?" he questions with worry. El shakes her head, still smiling, which confuses Mike even more, "It's just...amazing" is all she can say.

And at her words Mike can only pout his lips in thought, but at her smile, Mike relaxes, and squeezes her hand. They are brought out of their moment as Joyce pulls out a chair across from them. El turns her attention to the older woman, "Go ahead kids, dig in, Nancy and Jonathan will join us in a bit. El, there are plenty of eggs" she cheerfully tells the girl, and her eyes light up at the sight of her favorite meal.

"Don't forget some eggs, and a meat too kid", a gruff voice comes

from behind them. And El can't help but roll her eyes. "Yes" she grumbles as she loads three eggos onto her plate, along with a helping of eggs and bacon. Mike follows her lead.

El is pouring syrup over her eggos, and she hands it over to Mike, who gives her a small, "Thanks". She grabs the fork beside her as she begins to cut up her eggos, however, she turns her attention to the boy beside her, who is heavily loading his eggos, eggs and bacon with maple syrup. Her movements stop as she watches him with curiosity.

As if Mike can feel her eyes on him, he turns his head towards her and he gives her a shy smile, "Sorry, I just like syrup on everything" he chuckles, his face blushing slightly. "I know it's gross...but-" El stops him by a shake of her head as she reaches over to grab the syrup bottle he has placed in front of him. She pours the syrup over her eggos and bacon as well.

"No, El, you don't have to-" Mike attempts to stop her, but she has already poured the syrup over everything. Mike watches as she finishes, places the bottle in front of her, as she picks up her fork and stabs at her eggs and pops them into her mouth. She chews thoughtfully, and even though she was slightly unsure about the combination at first, she actually smiles in delight.

Mike quirks an eyebrow at her, "Good?" he asks. And she can only smile and nod her head until she finishes swallowing her bite as she states, "Really good" with a genuine grin.

She watches as Mike relaxes and begins to dig into his own food. "Ew, Mike, don't tell me you taught this poor girl to put syrup on her eggos?" Nancy and Jonathan appear beside the table. Jonathan lets out a long yawn as Nancy gives Mike a look of disgust. El only shakes her head at the older girl, "It's good" she states simply. And Nancy laughs, "If you say so" she says with a shrug of her shoulders as she sits down besides her brother.

Nancy gives Mike a quick shove, in which he shouts, "Hey!" and shoves her back. But then, they grin at each other as Nancy loads her plate. El watches the interaction in wonder, not really understanding how bumping shoulders roughly seems to be a way of

acknowledgement, but, it's another question she holds onto for later. Now, she enjoys the company of people around her as she continues to eat her breakfast.

She is only sitting a chair away from Will, and so many questions fill her buzzing head that she wants to ask the boy. But, as if an aura washed around the boy, she could tell that, like her, she was still recovering for the weeks worth of events. Both of their bodies tired and worn, ready to move on.

Silence falls over the table as the only noise that resonates around them is the occasional squeak of a fork making contact with a porcelain plate. El actually enjoys the silence around her, as she sinks into the contentedness around her. However, she is immediately startled when a loud knocking resonates from the front door.

Everyone around her stops mid motion, all eyes flicker towards Hopper. El's amber eyes are glued to his in silent fear. Her heartbeat begins to thrum against her chest. She feels her now sweaty hand within Mike's and she feels him give her a tight squeeze.

El watches as Hopper lets out a deep sigh, giving her a reassuring look as he rises to his feet. Her eyes don't leave his body. He clears his throat, "Don't worry, I'm sure it's nothing", he scoots around the table as he approaches the front door.

They all sit as silent as possible as they attempt to listen to Hopper as he approaches the door. El doesn't want to move or even make a peep, her worst fear of being discovered dances across her mind. Her breath is now coming rapid, and she tries to hide the fact. However, she feels a person come closer to her, "Don't worry El, I'm sure it's nothing" Mike has scooted closer to the girl, as he wraps an arm around her chair, attempting to soothe her. El's eyes find his, and she searches them for meaning. And what she finds is reassurance, his dark amber irises are full of kindness, and she finds solace within them. She takes in a deep breath and attempts a half grin on her face, relaxing slightly.

She keeps her eyes connected with Mike's finding peace there. However, her worry is almost immediately washed away the second she hears a voice through the door, "Guys, come on, let us in!"

And she can see Mike relaxes even more so too, hearing the voice of their boisterous friend on the other side of the door. She half listens to the conversation between Dustin and Hopper at the front door as she hears Mike let out a breath beside her, "Okay, it's just Dustin and the other's, everything's good" Mike gives her another warm smile, she nods at his words, as she calms her breathing, returning to the silence.

But, the silence doesn't last long as the rest of the party clambers into the kitchen, and immediately there are a million questions being thrown out and hugs being passed around the table. The action and loudness immediately surprises El, for, she is not used to this type of atmosphere, and her eyes widen at the stimulation.

And as if Hopper can sense her fear, a loud, "Hey!", echoes around them, all voices falling silent as all eyes fall on Hopper.

El watches as he lets out a long breath before he speaks, "Look, kids, I know you are all anxious to talk to El and Will about what happened, but all you need to know is that the gate's closed, and both are safe and sound. *You* are all safe and sound", he looks over everyone, his eyes landing on El's.

He opens his mouth to speak again, "El closed the gate, that means the nightmare with the Upside Down is done. These two have gone through a lot, how about in time they can tell you what went on, but for now...just relax, be kids" he shrugs his shoulders to them. El immediately feels relief wash over her, her gratefulness for this man growing.

Once Hopper is done with his little speech, El watches as smiles grow on the parties faces, but Dustin is the one to speak, "Yeah, Hopper's right", Dustin nods in agreement, "Hey!" he starts excitedly, all the teens eyes are on him, "Let's teach El some board games, I'm sure she'll love them!" he jumps to his feet. El startles once again at the boys enthusiasm, not really sure as to what she should do.

Lucas jumps in as well, "Yeah, I bet Hopper doesn't play any with her" he turns and teases the middle age man, who huffs in return.

El however, speaks up, "We play games...go fish...old maid..." she

begins to list off, but she's cut off by Dustin, "What, that's it?!" El is taken aback by his suddenness. Her eyes widen as she watches the boy.

"Come on El, we've got to teach you a proper board game" Dustin states officially as he begins to stand. "I've got a ton of games in my room, we can play in there" Will stands to move from the table, an excited grin on his face. El watches as everyone begins to move, she is beginning to feel unsure, but excited as well. However, she remains motionless in her chair. She begins to feel Mike standing beside her as he pulls their intertwined hands up with him. El gives him a worried look, and he returns a soft one to her. Mike pulls at the girls hand with delicacy as he pulls her up. He gives her a fierce smile. "We don't have to play if you don't want to, Dustin's just excited is all" Mike explains El. And at his chivalry, El's heart melts, knowing that he would do anything to make her happy, even if that meant doing something else other than with his friends. However, knowing that Mike will be by her side the whole time El gives him a gorgeous grin and pulls at him, "I want to learn", she states proudly.

And at these words, Mike nods enthusiastically as he pulls El towards Will's bedroom where the others have disappeared to. They move around the table, but El stops in her tracks, halting Mike's movements, he gives her a questioning look. He, however, can see that El's eyes have found Hopper's.

El stares up to the larger man, he gives her a quizzical look, "Is it okay...to go with my friends" she asks delicately to the man. And, El watches as the man's face softens, contemplating her words. She silently worries that he will say no, but instead, the man reaches out and places a gentle hand on her shoulder as he smiles at her and says, "Have fun". El gives him a brilliant smile, and she quickly turns as she pulls Mike towards Wills room.

She enters the room where she had slept the night away with Mike by her side, however, now with four other bodies in the room, it feels small. Mike shuts the door behind her, and panic rises in her chest. Her eyes flash to the door, in which Mike catches, his eyes connect with hers. "Hey", he says softly to El, who's eyes are brimming with small tears, "It's okay, we're all in here with you, we can leave the door open a little if you want?" he asks gently.

At the smoothness of his words, El lets out her held breath, shaking her head at her anxious feelings, and turns her mouth upwards. "No, I'm okay" she smiles to the boy, who gives her one in return, he pulls her over to where their friends sit waiting as Will pulls out an array of board games.

Mike can't help but beam in excitement, as he watches El's eyes light up in wonder as she gazes upon the bright covers of each board game Will has laid out. They join the circle, sitting next to each other, hands still clasped together.

Will is speaking, "I've got, Clue, Uno, Chutes and Ladders.." he lists as he pulls each game off of the shelves. "We should start with something easy" Mike speaks to the group. Max, however speaks, "Why, who hasn't played these before?" and she doesn't realize how stinging her question is.

Mike's heart pounds hard for a second, as his head whips to El, here face saddens. Mike turns to Max with a slight glare, as the other's eyes are on the redhead as well, however throwing her a look of alarm. "What?" Max asks the group, but Lucas is the one who catches her eyes, as he tilts his head towards El as in saying, *remember?* And Max's eyes widen in horror, she opens and closes her mouth, "Oh, uhm...I didn't mean like that...uhm...I meant who plays these baby games anyways", she tries to put off submissively.

The boys around her sigh and grumble, Mike is desperately trying to get the girl beside him to look at him. "El, it's okay, that's why we want to play these games with you, so we can teach you how to play" he encourages. But the girl still seems saddened.

Max speaks up again, "Why don't we teach her a real game anyways, like, Monopoly or something, I bet she's good with numbers" she shrugs towards the girl. And, for some reason at the girls attempt to be nice, it perks El's head up. "Numbers?" she asks the girl.

El's words towards the redhead startles her slightly, because their first interaction had not been entirely friendly. Max stumbles over her words a bit, "Yeah, uh, you get to buy properties and beat each other out, there's a lot of math involved with it" she offers the girl.

Mike watches El with interest, she seems to want to say more to Max, but something hold her back. Her eyes narrow slightly, but she shrugs and turns to him, "Monopoly, teach me" she states bluntly, and Mike blinks at her. He then turns hesitantly to his friends, they all shrug in return, knowing that the game might be a bit much, but....he turns his head back to the girl beside him. And now, she's giving him these adorable eyes, and he sighs, knowing that he is done for.

Mike nods though, and looks back at the others, "Let's teach El, Monopoly, then" he shrugs. And with hesitation, the other boys shrug as they begin to open the box, and set up the game.

El is mesmerized watching the boys set up the game as she sits back and watches. Her eyes scan the board, looking at all the colorful boxes that are aligned in a perfect square. Dustin and Lucas are counting out pieces of paper, while Mike and Will set up two stacks of yellow and orange cards.

"Better not cheat and put, 'advanced to boardwalk', at the top *Mike*", Dustin throws to the boy who scoffs at him. "Tch, Dustin, I don't cheat" he rolls his eyes. El watches the boys interactions with one another as she sits back and watches.

Once Dustin and Lucas are done with the stacks of paper, they hand it out to each person around their circle. Lucas hands a stack to El, who stares curiously at it. She can feel Mikes eyes on her, so she turns her attention to the boy, she gives him a questioning look. He chuckles lightly, "Why don't we team up this time, that way you can learn and play at the same time", he suggests.

El flicks her eyes towards the stack of paper that she holds loosely in her hand, she has no idea what it is. And she nods her head in relief at Mike's suggestion, "Yes, want to learn first" she states. Mike grins wildly at her as he takes her paper gently from her hand and hands it back to Lucas, who rolls his eyes.

"We'll just use my stack of money, it wouldn't be fair to have two" Mike explains as he holds up his stack of paper to her. "Money?" she asks curiously. Mike nods his head to her as he fans out the colorful

paper in front of her, "Yeah, this is money, and all these little squares-" he then gestures to the squares around the board, "Are properties, and you use money to buy them" he explains to her.

Mike then goes over the amounts of money to her and how you have to use math to figure out how much money you need to buy properties and how much you get back in return. El smiles at Mike as he explains this to her.

"I get to be the racecar!" Lucas shouts as he grabs for a small silver token. "No, it's my turn Lucas!" Dustin bites back, but Lucas shakes his head, "Uh, no, you got to be it last time!" Lucas snarls at the curly haired boy. El watches as both Mike and Will huff and roll their eyes at the boys, when Max steps in, "Oh my god, it's like watching two year olds fight at the playground, just rock, paper, shoot, for it" Max huffs.

And almost immediately both boys silence their fighting as El watches the boys do something with their hands. It doesn't last long when Lucas pumps his fists in the air in excitement, "Yes, *I* get to be the racecar!" he says triumphantly as he takes the small token and places it on the word 'Go'.

Dustin huffs, "Fine, but next time, I'm the racecar, and we're writing it down!" he says indefinitely. El feels Mike nudge her, she turns her attention to the boy, "What do you want to be El?" he holds out his hand where other little tokens sit, gleaming dully in the light. El's eyes widen, "I get to pick?" she questions the boy who smiles brightly, "Yeah, of course, whatever you want to be, El".

El feels excitement rise within her as she looks over the pieces, however, one catches her eyes in interest, she reaches into Mike's hand and withdraws the token that is a horse, with a person riding on it, she holds it up to Mike, "A horse, like the westerns Hopper watches" she examines the piece in her hand.

Mike nods, "Good choice, El" he states as he nods to the board, "Place it next to the racecar, it's how you keep track of where you land" Mike explains and El reaches out, placing the horse next to the racecar.

Will chooses the thimble, Lucas the top hat and Max picks the dog. The pieces remain ready on the game board. El watches as Lucas picks up a pair of dice, he shakes them eagerly in his hand, "Alright, let's begin!" he shouts as he throws the dice onto the board and the game begins.

El flicks her eyes between her friends as they land on certain property, and say whether or not they want to 'buy' the property. El was happy that she and Mike were last, because she was trying to figure out the game by watching, but Mike was helping greatly by whispering what her friends were doing between each movements.

But, after watching each of her friends roll the dice, and then land on either a property, railroad, chance card or even the more unfortunate spaces, it was her turn to roll. Mike snatched the dice from the board and handed them to El, she took them, everyone's eager eyes on her. She couldn't help the grin that spread across her face as she shook the dice in her hand, and let them roll.

She watched in anticipation as the die rolled and landed neatly on a five and six. She hears her friends laugh beside her. "Of course she rolls and eleven" Dustin chuckles, and at this El smiles. She reaches forward to grab her loan horse piece at 'Go' and moves it forward eleven spaces. Her piece lands on a pink square that is labeled "St. Charles Avenue".

No one has purchased the property, she turns and smiles at Mike, who is also beaming at her, "Nice roll El!", "Now we can start our collection" he says gleefully.

El can't help but feel excited over the prospect of the game, she leans closer to Mike as he says, "Okay, it's \$140, so I'll give you, \$500, Dustin you owe me-" and before he can even begin to calculate how much Dustin will owe Mike, El opens her mouth to speak, "Three hundred and sixty" she says nonchalantly.

El is staring intently at the game board, however, when no one moves, she looks around at her friends who are all looking at her with mouths wide open, she gives them a questioning look, "What?" she inquires somewhat panicked at her friends.

"How..how'd you-" Dustin sputters looking wild eye at El. She leans back slightly, not really sure what she did wrong. Mike immediately senses her insecurity and reaches a hand out to her, she eyes him nervously, "El, you did nothing wrong, it was just...how did you figure that out so quickly?" he questions the girl.

El thinks on the question, then shrugs her shoulder, "Papa...he had me practice numbers...a lot" she stressed. She eyes the boy next to her, but she relaxes when she sees the smile plastered on his face, "El, you know math, and you're *really* good at it too!" he says with excitement. El feels happy about the surprised looks that now surround her, but a question still hangs on her tongue, "What's...math?" she asks, her eyes immediately going to Mike for him to answer.

"It's a subject in school, El, and since you already know it, and I mean *really* know it, that'll make it easier for you to meld into it" he explains thoughtfully. And quickly, El's mind begins to think about being in school, with her friends, with Mike, and she feels her heart beat faster in excitement.

But, then it dawns on her, she has no idea how much longer she has to be in hiding. Her mind flashes to the lab, where a lot of dead bodies of lab workers laid about, but she knew that didn't mean the lab was gone. Her face must have faltered, because she hears Mike call out to her, "El, are you okay?" she shakes her fog away, she shrugs, "Still in hiding" she says with little enthusiasm. And she watches as her friends faces fall at her words.

However, she feels something warm on her hand, she looks down and sees that Mike's hand has ended up on top of hers, he squeezes it firmly, she tilts her head up slowly, and her eyes widen when she sees the determination written on his face. "It doesn't matter El, you'll go to school with us, no matter what" his voice is firm, and she can hear the fierceness that falls behind it. She feels her heart swell.

She can't help but soften as she quips at him, "Promise?" In which he beams at her in return, "Promise" he states firmly, as they melt in each others presence. A loud cough breaks them out of their trance, both Mike and El turn back to their friends, who are all giving them knowing looks. El can feel her face flush at their eyes. "Uhm, are you

guys done with your love fest or..." Dustin teases them, and Mike huffs in return, "Whatever guys, let's just get back to the game" he states as he hands over the money to Dustin. But, Dustin's words, her friend's looks and the aura emanating from Mike, makes El catch her breath as she can't help but stare at him. Knowing that no matter what happens, she knows Mike will be there.

El picks up the game quicker than the boys and Max expected. And after a couple of hours, she and Mike are ahead, by *a lot*. "NO! Not Boardwalk!" Lucas cries as his piece lands on the property that has three little green houses perched at its top. Mike and El yell in victory as they look over their property and tell Lucas what he owes them, as he forks over the money.

"Geez, I can't believe this, Mike usually sucks at Monopoly" Dustin huffs as he throws his arms across his chest in frustration. "Hey!" Mike throws a glare at his direction. "It's true!" Dustin defends, and even Will nods in agreement.

Almost everyone who still owns properties is having to mortgage them. Max and Will have already declared bankruptcy. Dustin and Lucas are barely hanging on by a thread. "Why don't you guys just give up, El and I own almost everything" Mike taunts to the boys. They both glare at him in turn, "We won't give up, we'll make a come back!" Dustin states, as he picks up the dice and blows on them for luck, "Come on, seven!" he cries as he throws the dice onto the board, but, instead they roll to a nine, landing him straight on Vermont Avenue, which has a neat little red hotel, owned by Mike and El, they cry in triumph again as Dustin grumbles.

An hour later, only Dustin remains. "Come on Dustin, just admit defeat" Lucas grumbles as he lays on the ground, boredly watching the game. "No, never" Dustin grumbles. Even Will huffs in annoyance, "Dustin, we've been bored for hours, let's play something different?" he suggests. But doesn't shake his curly hair, "No, just need to make it past-" he tries, but is cut off by Max, "Ugh, oh my god Dustin, you won't make it past all their hotels!" she argues.

"If I roll a five, I'll be safe", he tries to stay positive. "Yeah, roll any other number, and you're done" Lucas states. Dustin sighs, "Just, let

me roll!" he grumbles as he picks up the die and shakes them profusely in his hand, "Come on, five!" he yells, and the first die lands miraculously on a four, the other die spins on its side, everyone watches in shock, as it wobbles, and then falls, a two facing Dustin. "NOOOOOOO!" the curly haired boy screams as he holds onto his head and crumpling his hat.

"YESSSS!" both Mike and El scream in victory as they stand, and Mike can't help but pull her into a hug. They rock back in forth, ecstatic about their win together. They pull apart, however, El stands close to Mike, as he rests his hand against her hip, he points a finger at Dustin, "HA! You said I'd never win, and look at that, I just did!" he says proudly.

El can't help but giggle at Mike's charade, enjoying seeing him so happy. When, for too long in the void, she witnessed his sadness wash over him. This Mike, though, made her chest swell with joy. And she can feel it reverberating through his body, and she can't help herself as she leans herself closer to the boy and plants a firm kiss on his cheek. She pulls away slowly, and she can see the blush beginning to form on the boy's face.

"Oooooo!" is heard around the room, El glances at her friends, as they stare at her and Mike, with knowing looks. "Oh, Mike and Eleven!" Lucas taunts to them. And immediately, El feels self-conscious. Mike huffs at them, "Calm down guys" he grumbles at them. But they don't relent, as Dustin stands and begins to sing, "Mike and Eleven, sittin' in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G, first comes-" but he doesn't get very far when a pillow smacks him in the face. All eyes turn to El, who has blood trickling down her nose. There's silence at first, and El thinks she has done something wrong, until she hears a laugh beside her, and then Will, Lucas and Max join in.

"What a shot!" Lucas admires El, and she shyly smiles. Dustin stands from his spot, "Oh, so it's a pillow fight you want, huh!?" he states as he begins to rush towards El, pillow in hand. She doesn't know how to react, but Mike steps in front of her and takes the blow from Dustin instead.

"That...wasn't meant for you" Dustin admits, but then, Mike is rushing to Will's bed as he pulls a pillow off the bed, and runs towards Dustin.

And within moments, everyone is rushing around, grabbing a pillow, and El copies their motions.

And soon, the Monopoly game is forgotten as the teens move around Wills room, laughter erupting from their lungs as they attack one another with pillows. Stray feathers fly about. El manages to whack each of the boys and even Max, and within that moment, with the room filled with laughter and joy, El truly feels like she is living.

Mike is still elated, his breath heaving as he lay on the floor, El beside him, as they catch their breath from the pillow fight. "That...was fun" El states as she breathes in and out.

The others laugh around her, as Mike turns his attention to the wonderful girl beside him. He honestly can't believe she is *finally* able to experience what it's like to be a kid with them. And he couldn't be happier.

"I'm hungry" Dustin's voice echoes around them. Will hops up from his bed, "I'll go see if we can get something ordered in!" he says excitedly as he rushes out of the room.

Mike and the others raise themselves upwards as they watch the boy run out of the room. They all move to stand near his door, listening to the conversation from the kitchen. Mike peers out the door as he hears Joyce say, "What's up bud?"

Mike watches as Will moves from side to side on his feet, as he speaks, "Uhm, we were just wondering, we're getting kind of hungry, can we order pizza?" he says hopefully.

The others hear Joyce laugh as she says, "Only if this guy's willing to chip in" she pats his shoulder lightly. Mike listens as Hopper lets out a long breath before he says, "Yeah, okay, what do you kids-" but as soon as he begins to ask for toppings, Mike is pushed out of the way as Lucas, Dustin and Max barrel past him, yelling numerous toppings at Hopper. He holds himself steady in the doorway, as he moves to look at El, who is giving him a curious look, instead of answering though, he holds out a hand and smiles to her. She returns his smirk with her own, as she grabs ahold of his hand as he leads them out the

door.

As they step outside into the kitchen, Mike listens to the others discuss pizza toppings, however, everyone is brought out of their own moment when a small voice beside him asks, "What's pizza?"

And even Mike is a little surprised at the girls words, as their hands are held firmly together. All eyes are now on her. "You don't know what pizza is?" Lucas asks incredulously, in which Mike watches as El shakes her head, looking down at her feet, feeling uncomfortable.

"What the hell Hopper, you never brought her home pizza?" Dustin stares wildly at the middle age man, who only shrugs, "Never thought of it I guess", Hopper admits. Mike sighs as Dustin doesn't relent, "It's a kids *right of passage!*" He shouts throwing his hands in the air. Hopper shakes his head at the dramatic boy, "Alright, alright, I guess we will even see if she *likes* pizza" Hopper tells the teens who stand about.

Hopper turns his attention to the girl beside Mike, "What do you want for a topping, El?" he asks her. Mike looks down at her as she gives the man a confused look. Hopper looks like he's about to speak, but Mike swoops in before he can even get a letter out, "It's like what goes on top of it" he explains with enthusiasm, and his heart thrums against his chest when El's face lights up as he speaks.

He continues to explain what a pizza is to the girl, "So, it's basically a flatbread, topped with a tomato sauce, then cheese, and then people add other toppings to that" he explains, and her eyes go wide, "Eggos?" she asks, her own excitement growing.

Mike can't help but have an unsure look cross his face at her question, but he honestly can say he should have seen it coming. He is able to compose himself enough to speak, "Uhm, you probably could...it's not a usual topping for pizza-" and at this he watches in horror as he watches El's face fall slightly, but before she falls to sad, Mike tugs at her hand to look at him, and he smiles brightly to her, "Why don't we do a plain cheese, and then you can add eggos here?" he suggests. And with relief, El's smile is bright once again, as she simply nods her head in agreeance.

Mike silently pats himself on the back for saving himself on that one. He turns his attention back to Hopper, who rolls his eyes as he goes to the phone to place an order for the pizza. Mike pulls at El's hand as he leads her into the living room, the other teens following. They sit around the coffee table, teaching El new card games, that she quickly enjoys.

An hour later, Hopper arrives back to the Byers place with an armful of pizza. The teens swarm him like a fly to trash, and he has to bark at them to 'get out of the way, or you won't get *any*' and they then calm themselves down enough to move so Hopper can place the pizzas onto the counter.

Mike watches as his friends attack the pizza like it was the last food on the planet, and he can't help but chuckle at their antics. He instead stands off to the side, his hand intertwined with El's as they wait their turn, desperately not wanting to lose a hand to their friends.

"What's that?" El leans in and whispers to him as he points to Dustin's pizza with the pineapple. Mike scrunches up his nose, "Ugh, pineapple, for some reason Dustin loves he" he turns to El and pretends to gag, in which makes her giggle in return. Listening to her small giggle, only makes Mike want to make sure he hears it on a daily basis. Warmth fills his body at having her so near.

When their friends have finally grabbed their pizza and head towards the living room, Mike pulls El to the table. She seems unsure, so he grabs two pieces of cheese and two pieces of pepperoni, he places one of each onto their plates.

El shoots him a questioning look, but all he says is, "The basic" and she nods with a wide smile.

They too, move to the living room to join their friends. Hopper follows them. Will, Lucas and Dustin have taken up the couch, while Max sits in the lone armchair, her feet tucked up underneath her. Mike and El sit next to each other on the floor sitting in front of the coffee table. El moves as she picks up her first slice of pizza. And suddenly, everyone stops eating, and their eyes lock onto El.

Mike watches as she brings the pizza to her mouth. He watches her as she takes a bite and chews thoroughly. And, as expected, her face lights up, and when she swallows she says, "That's really good", and her friends cheer.

They sit comfortably and chat idly as they chew on their pizza, exchanging short stories from their school days or from moments from the past. Mike doesn't like the teasing stories his friends lament about him in school in front of El, he glares at them, but El's reassuring squeeze of his hand tells him that she doesn't care what they say, she will always admire him.

Mike chuckles as El has quickly finished her first piece of plain pizza and moves onto the pepperoni, he smiles widely when he sees her eyes light up even more with this piece. She devours it quickly.

Mike is eating his pizza slowly, already knowing the flavor and deliciousness that it is, he can't take his eyes off of the girl who is experiencing this for the first time. She is getting towards the end, of her second slice, when he notices sauce has found its way onto her mouth. Without thinking, he grabs for his napkin, and he whispers, "El" to her. She turns to look at the boy, as she notices the napkin held out to her.

They lock eyes for a moment, as he gently reaches out and moves the napkin against her delicate skin. Mike watches as her face slowly lights up red, and he's sure he does the moves his hand downward, as El mouths a "Thank you" to him. Mike ducks his head, but then he gives her a smile, they move closer to one another.

It's as if everyone else in the room disappears. Mike can hear Dustin's babbling in the far off distance, but, right now, all of his attention has zoned in on the girl beside him. Their eyes move across the others faces, searching for something. Mike begins to feel the magnetic pull between them. He watches as El's eyes flutter down to his lips, and then to his eyes once again. His heart beats wildly against his chest. Forgetting everything else, Mike parts his lips as he bends down towards the girl, as he watches her bend her face up to him. Their noses softly bump into one another, but it's not to be as a loud, "So, how's the pizza, El?" makes it so they jump apart as if they've been struck by lightning.

Mike flounders a bit, his face red, as all eyes are now on them both. Will breaks the tension with his own question, "Yeah, which did you like better, El?" He hears El huff beside him, and his heart stumbles as he is pretty sure he hears the disappointment in her voice, but she answers with, "Pepperoni, definitely" she grins.

And the others let out either cheers of approval or faces of disgust. They continue to mingle together, when Nancy pokes her head around the corner, "Hey, Mike, mom just called, we've gotta get going soon" she says, biting her lip.

Mike hears his sisters words and can't help but let out a huff in annoyance, "It's the weekend, can't we just stay here again?" he stresses. But, to his disappointment, Nancy shakes her head, "Sorry Mike, I think mom knows something is up, she wants us home", she then turns to Lucas and Dustin, "I guess your moms want you home too" she says to them, and they let out noises of disappointment as well.

"But-" Mike tries again, his face filled with dread, his anxiety kicking into overdrive, knowing that leaving means, having to say goodbye to El, which, he does not want to do. Mike is brought out of his moment when he sees Hopper stand out of the corner of his eye as he says, "We've got to get going too, I still need to shower, and we need to get El back to the cabin".

At Hopper's words, something blazes within Mike, he gets to his feet quickly, "So, what, is this the last time we can see El?" he throws out, anger dripping from his words.

The room falls silent around them. He knows he shouldn't be doing this, but his dread, his everlasting worry of being away from El hangs over him.

The moment is broken when Mike hears Dustin say, "Oh geez, we're out of pizza, come on guys!" he bristles as he stands as quickly as he can, Lucas, Max and Will on his heels following him back into the kitchen. Leaving Mike staring down Hopper.

Mike eyes the man warily, as Hopper speaks first, "So, what kid? Everytime something doesn't work out in your favor, you're going to

throw a fit?" he fires at him. Mike immediately begins to feel his face grow warm, a red haze glazing over his eyes. He rolls his fingers into his palm, tightening them into fists. He wasn't going to lose this battle.

"It just seems like everytime you step in...El gets taken away again. And what, how long are we going to have to wait this time, two years?!" he throws a glare at Hopper, his anger getting the best of him. So he decides to keep fueling it, "You *know* how much pain that separation caused us!" Mike growls gesturing between himself and El. "I *won't* be kept away from her *this* time" he says through gritted teeth as he moves himself so that he is face to face with Hopper.

They both glare at one another, daring the other to speak. Hopper stares down at him, attempting to intimidate Mike, but he doesn't back down. In his mind, Mike has to show him how much he cares, how much the separation destroyed apart of themselves.

Mike watches in surprise as Hopper body relaxes as he lets out a long breath, "Well, kid, if you'd actually let me explain the situation, you might not get so heated about it".

Mike falters slightly, he takes a step back, his anger dissipating slightly, "What do you mean?" he inquires.

Hopper glares at him, "Are you going to let me explain, and *not* jump down my throat?" he questions the him. Mike searches his face, not wanting to relent, but then he hears a soft voice behind him, "Mike", he turns quickly to the source. El stands beside him, and she intertwines her hand with his and gives him a soft smile. He feels his body relax at her touch, "Let him talk" she states to him. Mike contemplates her words slightly, but he can't help but obey her commands, he knows he can't say no to her, so, he slowly nods and comes to sit with her on the couch.

Mike and El stare up at the man, waiting for him to explain. Mike focuses on the soothing motion of El's thumb stroking his hand. Hopper finally starts, "Look, I've got a plan that has already been started, and it has something to do with lab getting shut down and El being able to go out" he explains slowly, and at his words, Mike leans into his words.

Hopper holds a hand up in front of both of them though, a silent reminder of making sure they know not to get too excited, Hopper continues, "However, I don't know how long it will take, I'm hoping sooner rather than later" he says delicately.

Mike sighs at his words, as El speaks beside him "Don't like the word 'soon'" she mutters, and her words break his heart slightly. He softens, turning back to Hopper as he lets out a heavy sigh as he bends down to their level, "Hey kid" he tries to grab El's attention but she shakes her head, refusing to speak.

Seeing how upset she is, Mike reaches out to her as he delicately places an arm around her shoulder, he gives her a tight squeeze, a reminder that he's right there beside her. She slowly moves her head to face him. He gives her a warm, knowing smile, and she immediately softens at his look, silently understanding Mike's intentions.

Mike watches as El turns her head, directing her attention back to Hopper. Hopper gives her a grateful smile, as he reaches forward and rubs at her curls, she laughs at the affection. "I know you don't like the word 'soon' kid, but there's something else that comes with this instead" he explains, and both Mike and El give him a questioning look.

"I've gotten the go ahead to let you two be able to talk to one another-but, only through Mike's supercom" he allocates.

"But, El doesn't have a supercom" Mike states sadly, and Hopper rolls his eyes, "I'll get her one kid, and I'll let you know when you two can talk", he explains.

Mike's chest fills with excitement at being able to talk to El when they are apart, but in all honesty, he wants *more* than that. And as if El can read his mind she speaks his unsaid question

"What about *seeing* each other?" she asks with hopeful eyes.

Mike watches as Hopper sighs, as if he knew this question was coming, he eyes the man warily as he speaks, "That's where you guys are going to have to compromise and be patient, if I get the okay,

then I'll definitely let it happen, alright?" his eyes flick between each of them.

Mike contemplates Hopper's words in his head, however, El speaks again, "Snowball?" she asks in a small hopeful voice. And at her words, Mike turns to the girl, in utter shock, he can barely form words, "You...still want to go....with me?" he asks in disbelief, not knowing if she had remembered his explanation of the dance, and if she would *actually* want to go with him. But, his fear is diminished as El gives him a small smile, nodding at his question.

This then sends Mike's mouth into overdrive, as it widens in absolute joy, "That would be amazing" he sighs, his eyes, his every being melting into this wonderful girl beside him.

They are annoyingly brought out of their moment when Hopper says, "This again, I thought you dropped it?" his question aimed for El, but she shoots him a look, as she says "Promised". Mike's heart beats even more wildly as she remembered their word.

Hopper lets out another long breath, "I know kid, and I promise, I'll try my best to get you there with Wheeler, okay?" he says in a gentle voice. Mike hears the man's voice, but his attention is on El, trying to gauge her emotions.

Mike watches as El scans Hoppers face with her wide, amber eyes, attempting to make sure to see that there was no lie beneath his words. And she must have trusted his look, when she relaxes and nods to the man.

Hopper sighs in relief, "Thanks kids, I know this won't be easy, but we'll get there, you'll see". And at this Mike and El nod to the chief, as they slump against the couch, El's head coming to rest against Mike's shoulder, and he's pretty sure he feels his heart stop at her closeness. But he settles into her, enjoying their last couple minutes together.

Mikes eyes follow Hopper as he stands and moves towards the kitchen. He lets out a long breath as he rubs his head against El's, "Soon...I don't like that word either" he chuckles sadly at her. He feels El nod her head against his chin. "No....but promised, I will be at the snowball" she says with determination behind her voice.

Mike pulls away slightly and gazes down at the girl who is curled up against him. And he smiles warmly at her he wraps a gentle arm around her and squeezes tight, "Don't worry El, it won't be forever this time" he states, as they sit in silence together.

It seems like their time together went by so quickly, and El dreads the moment she will have to say goodbye to her friends, Mike in particular. El and the party are all standing around outside. Hopper had just explained the rules about talking with her to the rest of the party. Dustin and Lucas roll their eyes, while Max and Will sigh. El sees the frustration written on their faces and explains how it is a 'compromise' to them. They seem to somewhat understand, as they move towards the girl, each of the boys giving her a small hug goodbye.

El and Mike wait outside Hopper's cruiser as Dustin, Max and Lucas cram into the back of the vehicle. Once they are settled, El hops into the front seat, Mike following her as they squeeze in together. They blush at their close interaction, however, El honestly doesn't care as she rests her very tired head against Mike's chest, she feels his head rest against hers, and her whole body lights up in delight.

El listens as Hopper revs the old cruisers engine to life, as he skillfully backs out of the Byers driveway.

El closes her eyes as their journey is silent through the winding back roads of Hawkins. The cruiser bounces this way and that, which makes her body bump closer to Mike's each time Hopper hits even the smallest pothole. El reaches out an arm across Mike to hold herself steady, and she's pretty sure she hears Hopper scoff at their close proximity, but she honestly doesn't care.

Before long, Hopper pulls up to the first two houses and Max and Dustin are the first to be dropped off. El raises her head from Mike's chest just enough to wave goodbye to them. Lucas is dropped off next, and El and Mike take this moment to move to the back seat so that there's a little more room for them to sit next to each other, and so that they could get *some* privacy. El cuddles closer into Mike's chest as he holds her close. She knows his house is only a stone throw away, so she clings to him for dear life. She begins to feel the hot

sting of tears starting to prick at her eyes, and she desperately doesn't want to cry, not when that's all that she has done in yearning for the boy she now holds close to her.

However, she hears a sniffle, and turns her head up slightly to catch Mike's face, and see's that a stray tear has fallen, and that's when her tears let loose, as she buries herself into his neck, crying silently together.

All too soon Hopper pulls into the Mike's driveway, El watches as he turns towards herself and Mike. But, she turns her head just so, and her watery eyes that match Mike's find each other. They take the moment to memorize everything about the other. They way their faces move, the color of their eyes, everything, because they don't know when the next time they will be seeing each other. El wants to say so much to the boy, but not within the ear shot of Hopper.

She sighs heavily as she pulls away from Mike, however, she hears a sigh from the front seat, she turns to Hopper who is flicking a hand at both of them, "El, you can walk him to the door to say goodbye, just don't linger too long, okay?" and at his words, a small breath escapes El, and she hears Mike do the same. They both smile brightly at one another as Mike opens the door to the cruiser, stepping out first.

El follows behind Mike, who begins moving towards his house, however, she hesitates slightly before closing the door, she can't help but narrow her eyes at Hopper, sending him a silent message of, *please don't watch us*. She watches as Hopper rolls his eyes and turns his head away from Mike's house as he waves a hand at her and says, "Don't worry kid, I won't watch" El smiles at his words, as she shuts the cruisers door and quickly runs to catch up with Mike, who stands waiting for her only a couple feet ahead of her.

He holds out a hand to her, in which she eagerly grasps as she holds onto his arm, and lays her head gently against his shoulder. She sighs in contentment as Mike walks her to the front door. They stay silent even as they step up the concrete steps. They turn and face one another.

Mike gives her a tight smile as they hold both hands between each other. "So..." Mike attempts to break the silence that hangs between

them. "So..." El quietly repeats, which brings a smile to the boys face, in which she loves to see. Mike shakes his head at her, "There's...just so much I want to say, just to you, but...I feel like we didn't even get two seconds alone" he explains as he plays with her hand, having a hard time meeting her eyes.

El nods in return, knowing exactly how the boy feels, because she wants to talk to. About the year they had apart, about the Upside Down, about everything. "I know, me too" El whispers to the boy, who finally looks into her eyes. Even though they had only spent a week together a year ago, an unbreakable connection formed between the two of them. And El wanted to know more about this boy, she wanted to grow and experience new things with him. Her heart sighed heavily within her.

El searches the boys face, and she watches as he fights with words he wants to say, he opens and closes his mouth, debating over his words, "El" he finally chokes out, and she smiles softly at him, "Yes", she whispers to him. "Uhm...when we get to see each other again...can it be...just you...and me?" he gives her a heartfelt look. El understands his words, as her smile grows larger, she gently nods her head, "Yes, I'd like that" she says gently, as Mike's mouth grows into a timid smile as he lets out a breath in relief, "Good, ok" he breathes. And El can't help but giggle at the boy.

They stand there for a moment, just taking each other in, when their eyes meet, and something else stands between them. She feels herself moving closer to the boy, and he mimics her movements. The pull is immensely strong, and El had never felt it before, until she met this amazing boy in front of her. Everything about her wanted to just be closer to him, like not having any kind of physical connection to him made her feel empty. She thinks back to the night in the cafeteria, when they had shared their first kiss together, it was something she didn't understand then, but did in this moment.

She watches as Mike bends his head lower, and she stands on her toes slightly, wanting to meet him halfway. Their nose brush against one another, cold from the night air, they stop, their eyes searching the others, making sure this was okay for the other, but as they both felt the pull, they closed the space between them.

El feels the warmth spread between them as their lips connect with one another. This time she feels Mike cast out his hands slowly, as he gently grasps her arms and pulls her just a little closer. El's hands move and find their way onto Mike's chest, and she grasps at his shirt. Their mouths move tentatively against one another. And El immediately melts into the embrace, this kiss being the longest between them.

She feels Mike shift his head slightly so that their mouths part for a moment, but are together within a second. El takes this moment to toss her arms behind the boys head, pulling him tighter together. It's sweet and innocent. But when they finally pull apart for a breath of air, it's as if everything around them is lighter. They give each other warm smiles, but El wants to be within his arms again so she throws her arms around his neck, as their bodies are taught against one another. Mike's arms hold her tightly, and she feels every ounce of the feeling he is pouring into their embrace.

"This is nice", El whispers into Mike's ear. She feels him hum against her in delight. "Yeah, it is" he says. And slowly, they break apart, knowing that their time is short. El feels her face fall, and she watches Mike do the same. He attempts a smile at her, "Call me the second you get your new supercom, okay, channel eleven" he smirks. El's heart swells at the boys words, and she nods, "Channel eleven" she whispers.

There is a heavy silence that falls between them, and El is holding back her tears with every breath, but she knows Hopper will be calling to her soon. So, she silently steps forward and stands on her tiptoes as she places a gentle kiss on Mike's cheek. She lingers ever so slightly and pulls away, she can't help but adore the way his face lights up red at her action. They give each other one last smile as she steps down one step, their hands still grasped together, "Bye, Mike" she whispers sadly.

But Mike shakes his head, "No, no more goodbyes, I'll see you later" he gives her an earnest look. She beams at him, "See you later" she repeats as she continues to step down the front steps. Holding onto the boys hands until they can no longer be held. She misses his contact immediately, so she walks back to Hoppers vehicle backwards, not wanting to let Mike out of her sight just yet.

When El finally reaches the vehicle, and she opens the door, her head immediately turning back to gaze longingly at Mike, as he does the same. Hopper revs the engine once again, as El continues to gaze out the window as Hopper backs out the Wheeler's driveway. El doesn't take her eyes off of the Wheeler's home until it is no longer in sight. And once it is, she begins to silently cry, letting the pent of sadness wash over her.

The tears fall easily as she sniffles, trying to not cry out. But then she sees out of the corner of her eye that Hopper has reached out his right hand to her, she peeks up at him to see he's still watching the road, but he is trying to comfort her. She smiles to herself as she takes his hand in comfort and gives it a tight squeeze. She hears him sigh next to her, "Kid, I really do promise this time, soon, will be soon". She listens to his words, but there is an uncertain knot that holds tight within her stomach. At first, she doesn't want to believe him, but deep down....she knows he won't keep Mike and her apart, so she takes in a deep breath and says, "I know", through her watery breath, she turns to look at him with genuine trust embedded within her smile, and she sees him relax.

They sit in silence for a while, allowing the night to pass them by as they head towards the cabin. El sits, watching the trees go by, thinking of the dark haired boy when she feels Hoppers eyes on her, she turns and gives him a questioning look as he says, "So", he asks, "Did he kiss you?" he gives her a teasing look.

And at his words El can't help but gasp, as she leans over and smacks his arm, "Hopper!" she growls at him. And at that Hopper lets out a barking laugh, which she *doesn't* find amusing, "You said you weren't watching!" she throws at him.

He continues to laugh, "I didn't actually, but you just confirmed that he *did!*" he throws his head back, in which El growls at the man again, as her face lighting up red, as she crosses her arms over her chest, huffing in return.

"No fair" she comments as she turns away from the still laughing man. But, even though she is still slightly ticked off by Hopper's words, El can't help but smile to herself at his charm and silently thanks the stars for allowing two amazing guys to have come into her

life.

WOW! Okay that was 30 pages worth of writing! The longest chapter I have written yet for ANY of my stories! I really hope you all enjoy this one and I hope that it is not repeditive. It's hard writing the same thing in two different perspectives while trying to keep some originality in place.

So, next chapter will be Hopper's view again, and it will be the days leading up to the snowball!

Let me know, are you guys still enjoying the flip between scenes? I love writing Hopper's perspective because I think it's funny, but I can't help the Mileven fluff scenes from their own perspectives. Also, from some awesome suggestions going to try to integrate what the rest of the party thinks of this new budding relationship.

And as always REVIEWS are more than welcome! Thanks again!

5. The Snowball (Hopper POV)

Thank you, thank you, thank you, for all the wonderful reviews and feedback! Makes my heart soar for sure! I truly love writing these stories, and it definitely gets out the anxiousness in awaiting Season 3! Was really hoping to get a trailer on Stranger Things day, but, we were not graced with such luck :(

Anyways, here is the next chapter, some interactions between Hopper and El leading up to the snowball :)

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Chapter 3: The Waiting Game: Hopper's POV

The drive home to the cabin is mostly silent. The fatigue that has been pushing against his brain in the last couple of hours is struggling to get out. He can feel the heaviness of his eyelids becoming much more so as the driving continues. He has to fight the drowsiness that consumes him.

To keep his mind steady, he glances over to the girl who sits curled up in the passenger's seat, he can see that she has finally passed out. The exhaustion within her finally taking over. He sighs, and turns his attention back to the road. He lets out a long yawn that erupts from his lungs, as he shakes his head to deter the fog that wants to settle in.

The headlights to the old cruiser finally illuminates the forest path he has been watching for. Hopper slows the cruiser and pulls in, driving slowly through the bumpy trail. After what seems like hours to him, Hopper finally pulls up to his 'parking spot' to the cabin. He grumbles slightly, knowing a five minute walk is still ahead of them, and all he can think about is getting to bed.

Hopper cuts the engine, and the cessation of movement must have alerted his passenger to the fact that they were close to home. He turns his head once again to see the girl stir slightly. She turns her head to him, her eyes bleary with sleep.

She gives him a questioning look, "Home?" she asks. And at this Hopper gives her a small smile and nod as he opens his door, "Yeah kid, we're home", he says as he swings his feet out into the cool night.

Hopper moves towards the girls side, he gently opens the door, and she grumbles slightly at having to move. "Come on E, let's get inside so we can both catch some z's" he whispers to the exhausted girl. She grumbles again, but she forces herself to turn as she tumbles ungracefully out of the cruiser, Hopper barely catches her before she tumbles to the ground, "Whoa there kid, you okay?" he asks the girl, whose eyes are barely open. She gives a little nod, as Hopper pulls on her arm so that she can get her bearings.

She wobbles slightly on her legs, but Hopper watches as her eyes blink in the darkness. Hopper shuts her door, as he moves to throw an arm around her shoulder, ready to guide her back to their home.

Hopper lets out a sigh of relief once the cabin comes into view, he has honestly never been happier to see the place, knowing that a warm bed is waiting for him inside. They walk up the creaking steps slowly to the cabin. Hopper shakes El slightly to get her waning attention, "E, you've got to open the door for us" he says quietly.

He hears the girl let out a long sigh, but he watches with a quick flick of her head as he listens to the numerous locks click open. He pushes the door open slowly, guiding the girl behind him. He moves his hand so that he can flick on the lights. However, once the cabin becomes illuminated, he lets out a long breath as he takes in the state of the cabin.

It finally hits him that they don't have any windows, so the cool air sweeps in through the open gaps in the cabin. He can see that El had actually done what he had asked and swept up all the glass, and most of the furniture had been put back to its original spot. However, he also remembers that Joyce had just used this place to basically exorcise the Mind Flayer out of Will. So, there were still numerous heat lamps scattered about, and messy, bloody sheets laid against his bed, which had been taken out of his room. He sighs at the mess, as he moves a hand through his hair, thinking.

He's brought out of his thoughts though when he hears a quiet tiny

voice behind him, "Hopper?", he flips around to observe the girl still standing in place, fighting the sleep that wants to envelop her. He gives her a soft look as he leads her towards her bedroom. "Why don't you get changed into your pj's, and crawl into bed, I'll pick this place up a bit, okay?" he gives the girl a small smile.

She only nods her head in return as she moves towards her bedroom, shutting the door behind her. Once she is safe behind the door, Hopper takes another look around the cabin, he shakes his head.

"Well, I'll just put my bed back for now, and pick up the rest tomorrow", he mutters to himself as he moves to remove the bloody sheets from his bed. He bunches them up carefully and sets them on the couch. He then moves his old iron bed back into this nearby bedroom, just past the kitchen, trying to be as quiet as possible so to not disturb the girl in the other room.

Once he has gotten his bed back in its original place, he moves to his closet and pulls out a set of fresh sheets and makes the bed. After he has completed his task, he moves back towards El's room. He stops at the door, and opens it slowly, knowing that the hinges creak do to their rusty appearance.

Hopper pokes his head in just enough to catch a glimpse of El who is snuggled up in her bed, her curly hair poking out in all directions as her chest rises and falls in a steady motion. Hopper can't help but smile at the sight before him. After everything they have gone through, he was honestly unsure as to where everything would end up.

Truth be told, he was afraid to lose another important person in his life, and the stress of dealing with that weighed heavy on him. But now, the gate was closed, Will was free from the Mind Flayer's control and a sense of ease was finally cast over them.

Hopper pulls his head out of her room, as he moves to shut the door, letting the girl get the well deserved rest she so rightly deserved. He shuffles back to his bedroom, as he gets himself ready for bed, the exhaustion that has been nagging at him for the last couple of hours finally getting the better of him.

He lets out a long huff of air as he lays down on his bed as he pulls his sheets and old blanket tight around him since the windows provide no protection from the slight cold that seeps in. "*Yep, definitely getting glass for the windows tomorrow*", he thinks to himself as he shivers under his layer of sheets.

But, soon enough the weight of his eyelids begin to droop, as he makes a mental list of what he needs to get tomorrow. He doesn't make it very far as he drifts off into a dreamless sleep.

He is awoken by a loud cawing that screeches through the cabin. Hopper startles at the suddenness of the unexpected noise. He blinks his eyes blearily, attempting to take in his surroundings as he tries to determine if he could get some more sleep. He allows his eyes to droop back down once again, and just as he is drifting off, another pestering caw breaks into the cabin.

Hopper groans at the disturbance as he rolls over, trying to cover his ears from the infuriating noise, however, it seems the crows that have been lurking nearby have other plans. So, instead of trying to sleep through the frustrating noise, Hopper swings his legs over his bed as he buries his face into his hands and attempts to rub away the sleep that still hangs over him.

Finally though, he gets his wind as he stands, dresses and makes his way out into the living room. As he steps into the kitchen, a cool brisk air sweeps through the cabin, a shiver runs up his spine. He quickly makes it to the wood stove and begins to make a fire, it catches fairly quickly, a soft warmth begins to trickle into the cabin.

He then goes around to each window, and pins up old blankets, desperately trying to keep the cold out. Once he's done, Hopper observes the now dark cabin and nods his head in approval, knowing that this will have to do for now. He moves into the kitchen as he prepares a pot of coffee.

With a hot cup of freshly brewed coffee in his hand, Hopper moves towards El's room, he creaks the door open slowly, he looks and sees that El has hardly moved in her sleep, and she is still cocooned within her blankets.

He smiles at the sight of the girl, and decides to not wake her just yet. And he mentally decides that he will run out to town now so that he can get what he needs and by the time he gets back, he hopes he will get all the windows placed back in.

Hopper returns to the kitchen and pulls a pad and paper from an old wooden holder that used to be his grandfathers and gets to writing. This had been his and El's communication for the last year. For, there would be times he would be gone before the crack of dawn and others he would be back late. El had picked up on the reading and sounding out words fairly quickly. He just knew she felt more at ease when she knew where he was.

So, he quickly finishes the note, gulps down the rest of his coffee, and moves to head out the door. He gives the cabin one more sweep before he goes, when his eyes land on the broken television that lies in the corner. Hopper sighs heavily at seeing the poor thing laying there. He shakes his head, as he grabs his keys and heads out the door.

It doesn't take him long to stop at the hardware store and pick up the glass and tools that he needs, he's thankful that his grandfather's cabin doesn't have *too* many windows to fix, as the glass isn't exactly cheap, and he has other things he wants to purchase before he heads home.

His next stop is the grocery store to pick up eggos and other necessary items. And before he knows it, he pulls up outside the Radio Shack store. He looks at the building and sighs heavily, knowing that Bob would probably be working there right now, if he wasn't dragged into all the chaos that surrounded this messed up town.

However, he shakes the sorrow from his mind as he opens his creaky cruisers door and heads towards the shop. He enters the shop, the bell above the door jingling lightly. He stops at the entrance, his eyes moving across all of the gadgets he has no idea what they are. And instead of mindlessly roving around the store for what he is searching for, he beelines it to the front counter.

Approaching the desk, he sees a lanky teenager hanging up a variety of things on the hooks in front of him. Hopper stands at the desk, waiting for the teen to turn around, but, to his dismay he does not.

Hopper lets out a frustrated sigh as he waits, and his patience draws thin very quickly, so he shouts to the kid, "Hey!" And at his words the teen fumbles with the weird technology he is stalking and whips his head around to the man standing before him.

Hopper takes the teen in, he's got long brown hair that flips to the side and a dopey look hangs off his face. "Oh, can I help you?" his voice is low and slow, and this fact makes Hopper grit his teeth. But, he sighs instead, "Uh yeah, looking for this thing called a Supercom? It's my nephews birthday and I need to get it for him", he lies smoothly.

The teen nods at his words as he moves to walk out behind the desk. "Yeah, no problem dude, I'll show you where we keep em" he states as he leads Hopper to the right side of the store. Hopper bites his tongue when the teen calls him 'dude'.

They stop at a display of stacked boxes, Hopper can clearly read the word *Supercom* that is streaked across the box in bright red writing. He moves his arm to pick at the box, "This it?" he shrugs to the teen, who nods vigorously, "Totally, that's the basic model, but-" he says as he bends down to the other side of displays, picking up a box himself as he shows it to Hopper, "This, is our deluxe model, just got it in a couple days ago, has extended range, can reach up to a hundred miles!" he states excitedly. Hopper hums, listening to the teen, he grabs it from his the teens grasp as he places the one he holds in his hand back on the display.

"I'll take this one then", he gives the teen a tight smile. The teen nods eagerly, "Excellent choice dude, will that be all?" he throws to the man who desperately wants to smack the teen across the head for calling him 'dude' again. But, he restrains himself, knowing that this is for El, so instead he sighs and says, "Yep, all good", as he plasters a fake grin on his face.

The teen and Hopper make their way back to the front of the store, however, Hopper's eyes catch a handful of used televisions that are

marked down. He stops, "These work?" he points to the televisions as the teen stops and gives him a slow smile, "Very much so, they're actually not that old, people just like to trade them in for newer models" he shrugs.

Hopper nods at the boys words, he looks at the televisions noting their newer, cleaner look, and he actually silently admires that they are bigger than the old one that now sits broken back at the cabin.

The teen moves to one television in particular, "They all come with remotes too, which is pretty cool" he states with a dorky smile. Hopper rolls his eyes at the teen, but huffs, pointing to a larger, newer television, "I'll take that as well" he says and the boy chuckles, "Alright, man, I'll bring it all up together!" he says excitedly.

Hopper begins to chew the inside of his cheek to stay calm, the sooner he is out of this awful store, the better.

Hopper lugs the television out to his cruiser and places it into the back with a huff of air. He places the Supercom next to it. He grumbles slightly as he closes the door because once the awkward teen had rung up both purchases, Hopper almost dropped dead from the price. But, he promised El, and he couldn't leave her alone with *nothing* to do all day. And, he's silently hoping the tantrums will come to an end now that she's seen *that boy* again.

He pulls himself up into the cruiser, revs his engine and returns home.

Upon pulling up to the cabin, Hopper waits to pull the big stuff inside until he knows the door is unlocked and open so that he isn't holding a hundred pound television and attempting to open the door on top of it. He grabs the bag of groceries and heads up the old steps, at the door he gives his secret knock, hoping El is up.

He waits a bit, but then he hears the locks clicking open, he sighs in relief as he steps into the living room. He stops abruptly when a smell hits his nose. He flicks his head to the kitchen, where El stands, dressed and stirring something within a pan.

He panics slightly, he knows El has used the stove before, but usually within his presence, and she usually resorts to using the microwave and toaster for anything else. She sees him approach her, but she keeps stirring.

He stops behind her, looking over her shoulder, "What'cha cooking kid?" he asks. The girl shrugs, "Eggs, like you taught me, nothing else for us to eat" she states.

Hopper nods at her words, but then gives her a quizzical look, "Us?" he asks her. El moves her head side to side, acknowledging his words. "Knew you didn't eat, figured I'd make something for both of us" she says quietly, her eyes still moving the eggs, making sure they cook, but don't burn.

Hopper takes in her words, his heart warming slightly, knowing that even after everything they had been through, including the yelling and screaming match, that she still cared, and at this, he knew his money was well spent today.

He moves and rubs an affectionate hand through her hair, which makes her giggle. "That's awesome, E, how about we add to this breakfast" he states as he raises the bag in his hand. He watches as El gives him a curious look, but through the white grocery bag, she can see a familiar yellow box, and her eyes widen.

"Eggos?" she asks excitedly. Hopper chuckles, "Yeah kid, thought you deserved them, after closing the gate, I don't think you deserve to be grounded" he shrugs his shoulders. El lets out a small squeal of delight as she runs to the man and gives him a tight hug.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" she says excitedly as she pulls away, a bright smile plastered on her face, as she goes back to the eggs. Hopper melts again, as he watches the girl meticulously tend to the eggs. So, he just shakes his head as he retrieves the box of eggos from the bag and prepares two for each of them.

Once their breakfast is set, they both sit down at their kitchen table. El reaches excitedly for the maple syrup bottle, Hopper peeks his eyes up at the girl as she swirls the sweet substance over her eggos and the eggs, he cringes slightly. "You...actually like that? You know the

kid ain't here-" he starts, but El shoots him her famous glare, "I like it too, not just because of Mike" she states firmly. And Hopper holds up his hands in defeat, "Okay, okay, just making sure" he chuckles lightly as he turns to his breakfast, taking a forkful of eggs and placing them in his mouth.

His eyebrows perk up, "Wow, good job on the eggs kid" he says as he chews thoroughly, enjoying the perfect ratio of salt and pepper the girl added to the eggs. El tilts her head and gives him a small smile as she digs into her own food. They continue to eat in silence.

After they have both finished off their plates, Hopper grabs them both and places them in the sink to be cleaned later. He stretches his back, and sighs, "Okay kid, I'm going to need your help with getting these windows backup to shape, alright?" he gives her a questioning look.

She doesn't look too pleased, and she gives him those wide eyes, "I have to?" she tries. And Hopper nods, "Well, you made the mess, I paid for the repairs, so I think it's only fair".

El contemplates his words, but she sighs as she stands, "Alright, I'll help". Hopper gives her a nod, "Good, I'll go get the glass, you take down the blankets" he says while pointing to the windows.

El moves quickly as she begins to remove the blankets from the windows. Placing the tacs in the middle of their coffee table, and folding each blanket slowly, just as Hopper had taught her in the beginning. He smiles watching the girl, who, had come so far, in such a short amount of time, he couldn't wait to see how else she would surprise him.

But, for now, Hopper's attention turned to the glass and getting the windows fixed. He leaves the door open behind him, wanting to carry in each pane without having to open and close the door each time. He moves each pane of glass to rest behind the couch. El silently watches as she has finished her portion of the job.

Once all the panes of glass have been emptied from the cruiser. Hopper places his hands on his hips and tilts his head to El, "Ready kid?" he asks, and she gives him a small, silent smile, telling him she

is ready.

It takes most of the day to get the glass replaced within each frame. Hopper allows El to use her powers in little bursts to help him hold the glass in places as he glues them. He had picked a thicker glass this time so that the cabin would stay warmer in the winter.

They finish up the last window as the sun begins to set in the distance, casting an orange glow through the branches of the now naked trees of the forest. Hopper pushes the last pane in, steps back, and sighs out, "There, finished" he remarks, taking in their handiwork.

He turns to El who copies his stance as she grins up to him, "Finished" she says proudly, as Hopper chuckles. "Alright, why don't you get our dinners warmed up, and I'll finish picking up the mess, yeah?" he asks the girl. "Okay", she says simply, as she turns towards the kitchen to get out their usual t.v dinners. He watches her as she mindlessly gets the meals ready. He sighs to himself knowing that he needs to start doing healthier dinners for the both of them.

However, for now, he moves about the space, picking up any spare cuts of glass and he moves to set them on the porch. His eyes move to the cruiser, and he smiles to himself, he knows she's deserved both of the rewards that sit in the back of the cruiser, but he decides one right now and one before bed will suffice.

So, he moves and gathers the television into his arms, bracing himself as he carries the monstrosity to the door. "El!" he cries through the door, "Can you open this up for me!?" he yells, and within moments, the door opens with a flick of her head, and he shuffles in through the door.

He can barely see over the damn thing, but the excited gasp he hears from the kitchen helps him power through until he sets the television down with a huff. He turns his head up as he attempts to catch his breath, watching the excited girl approach him.

Her eyes are wide as she looks at the television, then him, "New, for me?" she asks, her eyes searching his. Hopper chuckles, "For both of us kid, I think we deserve it after all we've been through" he says

with a shrug of his shoulder. He reaches around to the back of the t.v and removes the remote that had been taped to the back, he holds it up to El, "Even has a remote" he waves it at her, and her smile grows even more.

"Can we watch, with dinner?" she asks, her hands coming up, clasped together under her chin. Hopper chuckles at the sight, "Sure kid, just let me get it set up" he states, and El bounds back into the kitchen to get their dinner.

It's not a hard process to get the t.v plugged in, and the rabbit ears adjusted. He presses the 'on' button, and the t.v springs to life, first, a bit of static rings throughout the cabin, but with some adjustment, a kids cartoon develops on the screen.

El gasps again, "It's...clear" she says in awe, and Hopper looks down to the t.v himself, "Huh, it is a lot clearer isn't it?" he gives El a smile, as she bounces on the couch, waiting for Hopper to join her, their dinners ready.

They spend the next hour immersed in their new 'toy', and Hopper has to admit that he's pretty sure he made the right choice in buying a new t.v rather than trying to fix the *very* outdated one in which came with the cabin.

El is finishing her bowl of ice cream as she and Hopper's eyes are glued to the screen as a rerun of *I Love Lucy*, play before them.

It just then dawns on Hopper that the Supercom he purchased still sits out in his truck, and he knows that he has to get it out for her, knowing she will desperately be searching for the boy most of the night. He sighs heavily as he stands from the couch.

The shift in weight catches El's attention, she throws him a curious look, "Where are you going?" she asks as he moves towards the door. He throws on his lauffers and points out the door, "Forgot something in the cruiser, will be right back" he states, and El shrugs, her head turning back to the t.v.

Moments later, Hopper trudges back into the house, holding the new

object behind his back. El's eyes are on him again, "What's that?" she asks nodding to what he is holding. Hopper chuckles, "Hold on now, it's kind of a surprise" he states, and this immediately grabs El's attention.

"For me?" she asks excitedly, Hopper nods, "Yeah, for you kid", he states, moving towards the girl, who is now bouncing in her seat. Hopper sits down next to her, the object still behind his back. He, however, wants to lay down some ground rules before he hands it over.

"Now, listen kid, I got this for you because I promised I would, and I don't know how long it'll be until everything is in the clear", his eyes search hers as she hangs onto every word. He slowly brings the object from around his back, and when El's eyes catch the very obvious words etched across the surface, her mouth hangs open, as she slowly reaches for it.

"Supercom", she says quietly, her hands stroking the box in wonder. Hopper moves his head up and down, "Yep, and it's an extended range, so, you'll be able to talk to the boy no problem" he says slightly proud of himself. El's eyes reach his, "Mike, his names Mike, not boy" she gives him a strained look. Hopper rolls his eyes, "Yeah, yeah, kid, I know", he reaches forward and rubs her head.

She smiles but all of her attention is on the box, she looks back to the man sitting beside her, "Can I open it, call him...tonight?" she asks somewhat nervously, thinking that he might say no. But, he nods, "Go ahead kid, see what the ki-, I mean Mike is up to". El smiles brightly as she tares into the box, and pulls out the new communication device in awe. Her hands examine every piece of it.

Hopper then notices the batteries that have fallen out of the box, he reaches for them, "Oh, don't forget these" he waves them up into her face, her eyes furrow in question. Hopper reaches for the device, flips it over, and pops open the battery pack. He then places the four double 'a' batteries into the device, closes the cover and hands it back to El, "It's so it works, you'll have to change them out every once in awhile" he shrugs. But, El is barely listening as she flips the device on and begins to fiddle with knobs.

"Remember which channel?" Hopper questions the girl, but she nods eagerly, "Yes, eleven" a small smile dances across her mouth as she flips through the channels, finally landing on eleven.

She looks down at the device, her heart beating wildly in her chest. She pulls the antennae from its spot as she remembers how Mike would talk to his friends, she holds down the button and whispers into the device, "Mike?" she says in a gentle voice. Hopper listens as the static rumbles through the device.

Nothing else comes through, she gives a worried look to Hopper. "Don't worry kid, he might not be around it" he shrugs. El, however, shakes her head as she presses the button again, "Mike, are you there?" she says, but only static crackles through.

Her face falls, and Hopper watches as her eyes fill with tears, she looks up at Hopper, "He's...he's not answering" she says quietly. Hopper reaches out and places a gentle hand on top of her own, she snuffles lightly, "Hey, it's still early, he might be having dinner or something, you can keep trying every little bit" he suggests. And the girl heaves a heavy sigh, "Okay" she says just above a whisper.

"Let's keep watching the show, it'll take your mind off of it" Hopper suggests as he rearranges himself to turn his attention back to Lucy. El falls back into the couch, the Supercom held tightly to her chest. Hopper glances at the clock, seeing it's almost six, and he knows that the kid might just be busy, or he silently hopes.

Every five minutes or so, Hopper hears the girl beside him fumble with her radio and as she attempts to contact Mike. A half an hour goes by with no response, and he sees the worry grow on her face. *Maybe he should have told the kid to be ready by a certain time*, Hopper thinks to himself, not wanting the girl to worry.

But, quarter past seven, there's still not return from Mike's end. And he can see El is growing sadder, but her eyelids are also drooping. He nudges her slightly, and she startles, "Hey, why don't you go brush your teeth and get ready for bed, I know it's frustrating, but if he doesn't answer tonight, I'll be sure to let him know you'll call him by a certain time tomorrow" he tries to reason with the distraught girl.

She sighs heavily, flicking the Supercom back on once again, as she whispers out one last time, "Mike, are you there....please" she whispers, but, again, just static returns. Hopper gently removes the device from her hand, and nods to the bathroom. She huffs, standing to her feet, shuffling to the door.

But, the moment her hand reaches the doorknob a staticy voice crackles through the device in Hopper's hand, when he hears it, "El?" crackles through, and in a heartbeat, El moves away from the bathroom, and swipes the device from Hopper's hand.

"Mike, is that you?!" the girl asks excitedly, her face lighting up like a Christmas tree. "Y-Yeah.. I-it's me...El", Mike's line is much more garbled, El frowns slightly, "It's hard to hear you" she states through the Supercom.

"I...c.n....hear...y...perf...ly" just barely comes through. "Hopper got the extended range" she explains, a smile growing on her face. "O...a...some!" Mike's voice crackles through, "Might....n-d...t...get one...too" comes in a little better. But instead of responding immediately, El seems to focus more, "How about now?" she asks, and Hopper watches a drop of blood comes down from her nose.

"Can you hear me?" Mike's voice comes in clear as day now. Hopper gives El a look, "El, I don't think-" he starts, but she gives him an exasperated look, "Just a little, not a lot of power" she stresses to him. He rolls his eyes, "Okay, but only a little, and when you feel tired, or drained, you need to stop" his eyes become serious. El nods excitedly, but her attention is back to the Supercom, "How was your day?" El chirps through the Supercom.

"It was okay...missed you" Mike's voice is low and quiet. Hopper watches as El's face falls, "Missed you too" she whispers back to him.

But, then her eyes catch Hopper's watchful gaze, she stands and moves towards her room, "Where are you going?" he asks as she opens her door. She shrugs, "Privacy", is all she says and shuts the door behind her.

Hopper gives the door a wild glance as he honestly can't believe that she has just scoffed him and has silently told him, she doesn't want

him around while she is talking with Mike. He shakes his head as his glance lingers on the door. But, for now he moves past it, knowing that for now, this is the only way they can communicate, and he has to be flexible somehow.

So, he turns his attention back to the t.v and focuses on that. However, he can hear the low voices, not being able to be made out coming from El's room, and he can hear her occasional giggle as well.

He rolls his eyes and shakes his head, he has officially gained a teenage girl on his hands.

9 o'clock rolls around and Hopper can still hear voices in her room, but, tomorrow is Monday, he knows the kid has school in the morning, and he doesn't want Mike's parents freaking out over why he is so tired.

So, he pushes himself on his groaning at his stiff back, as he shuffles towards the door. He opens it slowly, and he stands there, watching as El lays on her back, a wide smile plastered on her face as she listens to Mike's voice stream in through the Supercom.

She doesn't seem to notice his appearance, so he clears his throat, in which El's eyes flick over to Hopper. She gives him a look that says "What!?", and he rolls his eyes, he moves to stand by the bed. "It's a school night, time to say goodnight, okay?" he gives El a firm look. However, she still attempts to retaliate, "But, Mike-" she tries, but Hopper shakes his head, "No buts kid, there will be some rules about the Supercom" he gestures to the device, which crackles in her hands, "El, you still there?" Mike's voice comes through.

El huffs, "Yes, Hopper says you have school, so I have to let you go" she says sadly. "What, I don't usually go to bed till like...ten!" he states. Instead of arguing, Hopper pulls the device from El's hand and speaks clearly, "Listen kid, you and El can talk everyday through this device when you get home from school, but, you've got to make sure you're still hanging out with your friends, doing homework, etcetera, if you want this to work" he pauses. "You'll need to take breaks here and there for dinner and stuff, and you can talk after, okay?" he asks through the device, and then looks down at El, giving her the same

questioning look.

She huffs, and sighs an, "Okay" at the exact same time Mike's "Okay" comes through the Supercom. Hopper nods and hands the device back to El, "Ten minutes, then say goodbye" he gives a firm look to El, who smiles and turns back to the device. However, she doesn't speak into it again until Hopper has fully left her room and the door closes behind him.

He listens silently as he hears the voices of Mike and El pick up once again. He heaves a heavy sigh and thinks to himself, *what have I done?*

And it continues on like that for the coming weeks. He's had to replace the batteries to her Supercom *twice* already. The moment he gets home from work she's almost always tucked up in her room, he'll go, knock on her door, peek his head in to say 'hi', which she returns quickly, followed by a quick shooing motion. He then rolls his eyes in dismay, and waits till dinner to call her out.

He has to remind both of them that Mike still needs to keep up appearances with his friends and family, sometimes, and that he can't just haul himself in his room or basement, as El has told him. El doesn't like it when he tells her this, but, he has to play on the cautious side still.

Communication with Owens wasn't the easiest. He tries to call him a couple times a week to see how things are going, and the man will state, "*Hop, give it time, I'm doing the best I can*". And at this Hopper sighs, knowing that the girl cooked up in the cabin, who still asks him on an almost daily basis of when *soon* will actually be a reality.

He hates having to go back into this vicious circle or *soon*, because he knows her patience is waning, and so is the kids. He's not surprised when the last days of November creep by, and the kid makes a surprise visit to the office.

Hopper doesn't know it's him when Flo calls from the connecting office to say someone is here to see him, he just says, "Let 'em in" as he continues to fill out his pile of paperwork.

He doesn't look up when the door opens and closes. He can feel the presence looming over him, but he's too involved in a case that he doesn't look up, so instead he says, "What do you want?" in his gruff tone.

Hopper listens as the presence clears his voice and says, "Uh, Hopper, it's me". And, the familiar voice pricks his ears, so he finally lifts his head from his work, his light eyes meeting the boys dark ones.

He lets out a long sigh as he drops his pen unceremoniously onto the paper in front of him, and he takes this moment to lean back in his chair, stretching out his back, "What do you want, Wheeler?" he asks, just a bit too roughly, but he doesn't care.

He watches as Mike shifts back and forth on his feet, his mouth open, wanting to speak, however fear, seems to be holding him back. "I...uh...I wanted to talk to you" he states lamely, and Hopper rolls his eyes. "Obviously kid, or you wouldn't be here" he gestures to the boy.

Mike's face lights up quickly, but he attempts to hold his ground, by stopping his movement and standing firm, "Hopper, sir...I wanted to ask....I wanted to see if..." he continues to fumble over his question. Hopper groans, "Kid, just spit it out already!" he throws his hands out in impatience.

Mike startles but, he gets his words out, "I want El to come....to the snowball...with me!" spills out of his mouth quickly. His eyes are wide, and he's breathing heavily. Hopper processes his words, and attempts to weed them apart, but he shakes his head and says, "What?" instead.

He watches as Mike's shoulders relax slightly, he takes in a deep breath, "I...want El to come....to the snowball...with me" he says slower this time, and Hopper catches his words this time. And when he does he, he slowly nods his head and leans back once again.

"What's this *snowball*, anyways, she's mentioned it once, but couldn't really explain it" he gives the teen a questioning look. Mike begins to fiddle with the sleeves of his jacket, "It's a dance...sir" he throws in at the end.

"A dance?" Hopper fires back to the now sweating boy. Mike nods, "Yeah I uhm....I asked her to come...last year before she disappeared, and....now that she's back...I thought she could, uh, come?" he shrugs his shoulders, looking at the man before him with an unsteady gaze.

Hopper mulls the whole thing over in his head, "So, this dance is at the school then?" he asks. And Mike nods, "Yeah, a lot of people go, and it's more formal, I uh...didn't go last year...I was-" he breaks off, a deep look of sadness enveloping him.

He honestly *does* feel bad for the boy, but the words 'a lot of people go' stops his thought process. He leans forward slightly, his elbows rest gently on the desk before him. He takes in a deep breath, and then his eyes meet Mike.

He shakes his head, "I don't know, kid, it's still risky, especially being at a sch-" he starts but Mike jumps in, his fiery personality kicking into action, "Exactly! No one's going to notice, kids from other schools come all the time! She'll mesh right in!" his voice strains.

Hopper takes a moment to evaluate how quickly this kid can go from quiet, shy and reserved, to loud, fiery and argumentative in a second. However, he does seem to notice a pattern in this behavior, which happens to be any mention of El.

"Kid, I just...it's only been a month...I don't even know what's going to happen with this whole, *Murray* article either" he shrugs his shoulders to the boy. Mike huffs, his anger diminishing slightly, "Hopper, she deserves this...she deserves to be a normal teenage girl" he wavers.

The kids words do hit him, for, all Hopper truly wants is for El to be a *normal* girl. He wants to watch her go to school, graduate, start a family, do what she wants in life, but right now it still seems too risky, and his heart can't bare what would happen if El was taken away.

He sighs heavily, rising to his feet. His eyes meet Mike's and within them he can see the desperation, the want, the need, to want to do this for El. But, in this moment, he can't give him an answer.

"I can't say 'yes' or 'no' in this moment, there's still a lot at play" he raises and drops his shoulders, trying to put empathy into his words. Mike's eyes drop to the floor, he moves from one foot to another, when, he suddenly turns towards the door, yanking it open. This surprises Hopper as he moves to stop him, "Hey, Mike, wait-" he tries, but Mike stops in the middle of the doorway and looks back at Hopper with saddened eyes, "It's the fourteenth", is what he says, "Next month" he finishes as he moves out the door, shutting it behind him.

Hopper takes in everything that just happened as he runs a hand over his tired face, he growls. Feeling completely lost in this situation.

He arrives home later than usual, his paperwork taking longer than usual because after Mike's visit, all he could think of was trying to get this poor girl to the snowball. So, his work ethic slowed, making his return home late.

The lamps lit in the living room glow softly, he can see that the t.v is not on, which means that El must be in her room, talking to Mike. He desperately hopes that the kid hadn't said anything to the girl, not wanting to get her hopes up. But, Hopper prepares himself for what's to come as he gets out of his cruiser and approaches the cabin.

He wraps his knuckles against the wooden door in the secret knock, and moments later they click free. He pushes the door open with ease as he slips into the house, relocking the door. And just as he suspected, the door to El's room is closed, and soft voices are coming through the cracks.

Curiosity peaks his interest, but the *don't listen in to a girls conversation*, slips into his mind as well. However, he creeps over to her door, and pushes his ear against it, straining to listen.

"I promise, we'll get you there somehow, even if I have to sneak you through your window" Mike's voice crackles through the Supercom. He listens to El laugh at this comment, "Hopper wouldn't like that" she says back.

"Well, I promised I'd take you, and I don't like breaking

promises...especially to you El" Mike's voice is soft and endearing on the other end. Hopper hears El sigh, "I know, I broke the promise of going last year" she says sadly.

"You didn't break that promise El, that was different circumstances" Mike's way crackles slightly on return. "Yeah, being stuck in this cabin" she says back haughty. And this is when Hopper finally pulls away, a small ache sitting within his chest.

He moves away slowly, processing what he had just heard between the two teens. He sighs deeply, wondering what his next step will be.

Seven rolls around, as Hopper glances at the clock, he is placing two steaks, potatoes and green beans on two separate plates. He's trying to fulfill his silent promise to himself and El to start eating better meals.

"El!" he calls over his shoulder as he places the plates on the dinner table. "Dinners ready!" he calls. "Okay!" he hears from her room. He goes back to the sink as he fills them each a glass of water and sets them on the table, once they are placed he watches as El comes through her bedroom door.

Her face seems sad, as a frown pulls against her lips, her mood is definitely not 'happy'. She sits down, and grabs her fork and knife and picks at her food. Hopper sits down silently across from her, his attention falls on her as she only takes small bites of her food, her head resting in one of her hands.

He chews his food thoroughly before speaking, "How's your day?" he questions the girl. He peeks his eyes up to the girl, and she merely shrugs one shoulder in return. He already knows the answer to the next question, but he poses it anyways, "What's the matter, kid?"

At his words, she stops her forks movements, and turns her eyes to meet him, "Just, sad" is all she says, her eyes returning to her plate. He nods his head slowly, "Sad about what?" he quips at her as he places another piece of steak into his mouth, waiting for her answer.

"Miss Mike...alone a lot" she says in a quiet voice. And at this Hopper

sighs heavily, "I know kid, and I'm trying, *really trying*" he stresses as the girl looks up at him again. "I've been talking with Owen, and he's doing his best" he shrugs his shoulders at the girl.

His answer doesn't seem to cheer the girl up in anyway possible, she just huffs and continues to pick at her food. They sit in silence for a good while, Hopper is almost done with his plate as El has barely touched hers. He reaches for his glass of water, as he drinks, El breaks the silence, "Want to go to the snowball" are her words.

The water catches in Hopper's throat and he fights the cough lingering there, "Sorry, what?" he says through his raspy voice. El places her fork down on her plate as she pulls her hands into her lap fidgeting with her sleeves, *just like the kid*, his voice echoes through his mind.

"Promised Mike, that we'd go to the snowball...together" she says the words slowly and gently, refusing to make eye contact. Hopper sets his glass down as he swallows. "Kid, I know, Mike stopped by today-" and before he can even finish his sentence, El's head whips up, her eyes wide as she says, "He did?!" excitedly.

Hopper can't help but chuckle at her reaction, "Yeah, he did, and he asked the same thing, but just like I told him, I don't know what's going on yet...everything is still on thin ice" he tries to explain as he plays with his glass.

But, his words don't seem to hold well with El as she glares at him, "Always, 'I don't know'" she seethes. And Hopper chuckles again, seeing that she and the Wheeler kid aren't much different from one another. Soft and innocent on the outside, brutal fires on the inside.

"I know you don't kid, but, what am I supposed to do?" he asks her honestly, because, he truly *doesn't* know what he can do. He feels like he's swimming in a pond that just won't let him out, it just keeps getting deeper and deeper, everyone's problems continuing to fill it with their wants, their needs, but unable to let any of them go because he doesn't know what to do, he's drowning in teen angst.

El just shakes her head, as she looks down again, he watches as a stray tear drips down in front of her, now his heart breaks.

"El-" he tries reaching over to her, but she whips her head up, her face red and tear streaked, "NO, this isn't fair!" she yells as she stands and makes her way towards her room.

Hopper tries to stand quickly to catch her, but her smaller body is quicker, and she slams the door behind her. He gets to the door and jiggles the doorknob, she's locked it. He presses his ear to the door and listens as she sobs into her blankets.

He sighs heavily, desperately wanting to tell her to open the door, and that she's just going to have to wait, to be patient. But, his voice is caught in his throat, knowing that the last time he yelled at her, he ended up with a dozen broken windows, and he doesn't want that again.

Instead, something else inside him tells him to wait. So, with a begrudging sigh, he turns and leaves the girl alone.

He waits a while before he approaches the door again. He places his ear against the door, he doesn't hear voices, or any sobbing, so he takes this as a good sign. He hesitantly raises his hand and knocks on the door, "El?" he says, but nothing comes through.

He grumbles, "El, please can we talk, I'm not going to yell at ya, or anything, I...just want to be there for you" he states lamely, but it's what his heart is telling him to do.

He waits at the door for what feels like eternity and he's about to give up for now, when he hears the small latch to her door click. He takes in a deep breath and enters her room.

She has a small lamp on in the corner, she's on her side, turned away from him, curled up into a little ball, as she clutches onto an old bear that used to be Sara's.

He approaches the bed slowly, he bends down and reaches out, slowly petting her shoulder. She doesn't stir.

"El....I know this...sucks" he raises a shoulder trying to find the right words to comfort the girl. "But, there will be a day where....we won't have to worry about any of this, where you will be safe" he says

quietly.

El doesn't stir, but he continues to rub her back, letting her know that he's there. Finally, after awhile she speaks, "Just...want to be normal" her watery voice says, as she flips over, turning to face him.

His face drops when he sees her reddened eyes from crying, and the trails of tears that line her face. But, even more so with her words. He moves his hand and brushes a sweaty piece of hair away from her face, he gives her a gentle smile, "What do you mean?" he asks gently.

She lets out a soft breath, "Normal, go to school, no hiding, being with friends, being with...Mike" she whispers as she closes her eyes.

Hopper continues to stroke her hair, "And you will be, kid, that's *my* promise to you" he stresses, feeling himself getting a little emotional. "I-I know it's hard to understand, but sometimes things...take time" his eyes meet hers as she listens.

"If it were all up to me kid, I would give you the world, everything you deserve, but...I don't have that control. And I know it's not fair to ask you to be patient, but...you've done so well, and I *really* mean soon this time" he desperately tries to comfort her, to make her understand.

Her eyes search his as she contemplates his words. When, she finally lets out a long breath, closing her eyes as she does so. "Okay...I-I'll try to be more patient" she whispers, opening her eyes and meeting Hopper's.

He inwardly sighs and gives her a smile, "That's my girl" he says as he strokes her hair again. He stays with her until she falls asleep. And once she is out, Hopper stands, shuts off her lamp and closes the door behind him.

And, with a rush of determination, he moves towards the phone. He dials the number quickly. It rings a couple of times until a voice answers, "Hello?", the old voice breaks through the phone.

"Owens, its Hopper", the man states somewhat breathlessly as

adrenaline pushes through his veins. He hears the other man sigh on the other side, "Hop, look I-" Owens tries, but Hopper cuts him off, "No, Owens look, you've got to get this thing completed, and *soon*", he runs a hand through his beard.

"I know that Hop, but I can only-", he doesn't get to finish as Hopper cuts him off once again, "Owens, this kid was kept in a lab, *your lab*, for eleven years!" he growls into the phone. "She then spent another locked away for a year! Now, she deserves a life, a new life, and you owe it to her!" he barks into the phone.

He tries to calm himself, but the parental blood within him has kicked in and it's flowing hard and fast. He listens to Owens on the other end of the line breathing, "I'll try to have it done next week" is what he says, "I'll let you know when I'm done", he says calmly. And at this, Hopper finally feels relief was through him, he lets out a staggering breath, "Thanks Owens, it means a lot".

Owens chuckles on the other side, "I see that it is, you must really care for the girl" he teases. But, it's within his words that Owens words sink into him, and a grand smile pulls across his face, "You've got no idea" he says as he hangs up the phone, anxiously awaiting next week.

December creeps around the corner faster than Hopper would have liked, for, it's been a week since he last talked to Owen, and even though he's made about a hundred calls to the man, he has yet to hear from him. The dread slowly begins to fill him everyday that passes in the cold month, afraid that he won't be able to fulfill his promise to the girl who has reawakened his spirit.

Everynight he can hear her talking to him. He can't believe they still have so much to talk about, but they haven't seen each other for over a month, so he guesses he can't really blame them.

What's even worse is that every night when Hopper calls El out to dinner, she gives him this little look. She's silently asking if he's heard anything. At first he just gives her a small shake of his head. But, after a couple of days, he desperately tries to show her *some* hope, but he must give it away the second he makes eye contact with the

girl. His eyes unable to lie to her.

And sadly, each time, she'll tuck her head and fall into a silent state as she eats her dinner. It honestly breaks his heart each time.

He begins to think of different ways to be able to get her to this damn snowball. But, the back of his head is still screaming a loud alarm that keeps telling him: *keep her safe*.

It's a week before the snowball, now, and Hopper is surprised when he arrives home late, and El is curled up on the couch watching one of the soap operas she's come to adore. Which, is highly unusual for her since at this time she is usually in her room talking to the Wheeler boy.

He steps in from the cold, sets his hat and jacket on the coat rack, and then moves to look at the girl. Her face is stuck in a begotten frown, and she has yanked the blankets to curl up tightly under her chin.

She doesn't make eye contact with him, so, he makes it so by bending down in front of her, coming down to her level. She groans and tucks herself deeper into her blankets.

He sighs, "Kid, what's wrong? You're usual talking to Mike right about now", he asks the girl. In response she merely shakes her head, refusing to speak. Hopper rolls his eyes, "Kid, I can't help you if you won-" he tries, but El flings the blanket away from herself and sits up quickly, "Don't want to talk!" she growls at him, trying to distance herself from him.

Hopper startles back at her response, he then moves to sit on the couch beside her, she turns even more away. He reaches out a tentative hand and places it on her shoulder, she flinches at it and tries to move even further from his reach.

"El, did something happen between you two, did you get into a fight?" he pushes her. She shakes her head at this question, when suddenly her body begins to shake, and now she is crying. Hopper freaks slightly, not meaning to upset the girl. He scoots closer and gently pulls her to him. She allows him to set her against his chest as

she sobs into his uniform.

He rubs her back, attempting to soothe the poor girl. "Shhh, it's okay El, I don't know what happened-", but he's cut off by her taking in a deep breath as she attempts to speak, "T-Too, p-painful" she cries and she buries her head deeper.

Hopper can't help but be truly puzzled by her words. "What's too painful?" he asks gently. The girl continues to cry, but she pulls away slightly so he can hear her next words, "T-To talk....to M-Mike" she sobs out.

Hopper relaxes his body, understanding her words. "H-He tries to not t-t-talk about....the snowball...b-but he's s-sad too" she whimpers.

"Ah, kid" Hopper says as he pulls her tighter to him, wishing that he could make all of this pain go away. "I'm sorry, I'm really sorry" is all he can say as he tries to comfort the girl. Knowing that right now this is all he can give her.

El eventually cries herself to sleep and Hopper places her in bed. He watches as her breathes fall even with one another. He moves out of her room, and pads into the kitchen, pulling a beer from the fridge.

He walks out into the cold night as he moves towards the porch and sits gingerly on the old swing that still, miraculously, hold his weight. He allows the cold to wash over him as his breath puffs out, rolling into tiny clouds in the dark night.

He takes careful swigs from his bottle and sighs. He casts his eyes upwards, and to his small delight he smiles seeing the countless stars, twinkling across the blackness of the sky. And, as he watches, a quick light streaks across the sky, and if he had blinked, he probably would have missed it, a shooting star.

All though Hopper had never been a firm believer, well, in anything, there's something about this moment, that makes him look at the star as he closes his eyes and makes a silent wish to himself. When he opens his eyes, the night is still as cool as when he closed them. He huffs and shakes his head at his stupidity.

Hopper finishes his beer and returns to the warmth of the cabin, falling asleep soon after.

El is still safely asleep when he awakes early the next morning as he readies himself for his quick trip into town. Callahan had been working on an extensive robbery case and he had to go in for an hour or so to be able to make sure all the t's were crossed and i's are dotted.

Hopper pulls into the station with a loud yawn, as he throws his cruiser into park and makes his way into the station. However, where Flo usually sits to greet him, he finds her nowhere to be found. He moves to the conference room, where, he finds everyone working for the day standing around and talking in low voices as they lean over something in front of the table.

Hopper clears his throat to make his presence known. Everyone hushes and turns towards him, "Uhm, what's going on?" Hopper's voice echoes in the small room.

He watches as Powell moves to the table and grabs something, pushing it towards Hopper. Powell hands him a newspaper, "Check it out chief, I guess Murray wasn't such an conspirator as we thought, remember that Barbara girl?" he gives him a look.

Hopper eyes him and then the paper, "Yeah, why?" he asks, a bit too suspiciously. Powell shuffles on his feet as he points to the front page of the paper, "Well, apparently, the poor girl was killed by some toxic leak that came from the lab, they did a full investigation and found all this weird stuff inside, a link to child abductions and everything else. Now, they've got a week to pack up their shit and to get the hell out of town" he finishes.

Hopper's eyes immediately shift to the front page of the Hawkins newspaper, and there, in big bold letters reads, "*Hawkins Department of Energy Linked to the Death of Local Girl, Place to be Shut Down Immediately*". He lets out a breath of shock as his eyes skim through the story in a quickened place.

He takes it to his office after he finishes the paper and places it on his

desk. He leans forward slightly looking over the article, he shakes his head in disbelief as he lets out a laugh. "That conspirist actually did something right" he continues to smile to himself as a lightness fills his chest.

Hopper chomps at the bit trying to finish up Callahan's case so that he can get home and share the news with El. And just when he's about to leave, his office phone rings, he lets out a frustrated sigh, debating as to whether or not he should pick the infernal thing up. But, something inside him tells him to do so.

He yanks the phone off of its cradle and barks, "What?" into the receiver. "Hopper?" the familiar voice rings through the receiver, "Owens?" Hopper questions back.

"Heh, I figured I'd find you at your office, did you hear the news?" he asks a bit more brightly then Hopper had suspected after finding out he's pretty much lost his job.

"Yeah, just this morning" he speaks back. "Well, good news for your kid then, and, that means we can finally meet" Owens says through the phone.

A confused look grows on Hopper's face, "What do you mean by *finally* meet?" he asks with a serious tone. Owens chuckles, "Well, two weeks ago, some men from different newspapers and government officials had an official warrant to search the place. I would have called you sooner, but I had to save my own tail before I could get ahold of you to not seem suspicious" he explains.

"In order to finish, I had to be on there side, and thankfully, they bought it. Once the newspaper was released, I could finally contact you" Owen finishes. Hopper's breath catches in his throat, "So, wait that means..."

"Yep, it's all set, want to meet for lunch later?" Hopper can hear the grin in his voice. "Definitely, how about the bar on the edge of town, Dino's?" he asks the man on the other line. Owen chuckles again, "I'll see you there".

Hopper all but races to the diner when the time comes for him and Owen to meet. However, he pulls himself together to not seem too anxious about the whole thing. He enters the the old bar, and spots Owens in one of the booths.

He approaches the booth smoothly, taking off his jacket and setting it in the booth. Owens sees him, "Jim, good to see ya!" he states as he gestures to the other side of the booth that Hopper slides into.

"Owens. How's the leg doing?" he gestures towards the leg he has placed up on the booths seat. Owens laughs as he pats it, "Doing good, but, no football anytime soon for me".

Hopper nods and then lowers his voice, "So, you got it?" he asks. Owens plasters a wide grin on his face as he pulls an envelope from his pocket and slides it to Hopper.

Hopper eyes the envelope like it's a piece of gold. He grabs it and opens it slowly. And there, just like any other normal birth certificate is the name Jane Eleanor Hopper at the top, his eyes move downwards as he takes in the mother's name: Theresa Marie Ives. But, what startles him most is where it says father: James Gregory Hopper.

His eyes shoot up to Owens, he gives a low laugh, "Guess you've got a fun story to come up with, now that you've taken in your *love* child" Owens wiggles his eyebrows to the man who is staring at him in disbelief.

"How-" Hopper starts, truly unable to finish his sentence as he stares between the birth certificate and Owens. But, the man across from him merely raises his shoulder, "Hey, even sometimes I surprise myself, was even able to prove a dna match between the two of you, now *that's* impressive" Owen points to the man.

Hopper sits back in his booth, utterly surprised, taking this all in. Right there, within his hands, is proof, that, El, is now his daughter. A waitress stops by and places a sandwich on the table, Owens grabs half, taking a bite, "Want the other half, don't need all of this" he gestures towards the other half.

Hopper gives a half smile shaking his head, "No, that's okay, on a diet" he shrugs. Owens nods in return. A question sits at the tip of Hopper's tongue, so he speaks it, "So...how much longer...to keep up the, uh, hiding?"

Owens thinks the question over and shrugs, "Well, to be safe, maybe another year?" he quips out. And at the word 'year' all the breath leaves Hopper. God, how was he going to be able to explain that to El. In a moment of impulse he reaches forward and grabs the other half of the sandwich taking a bite, and thinking thoroughly before he speaks. "What about one night?" he asks the man.

Owens moves his head back and forth, "Don't see anything wrong with that, I mean, you're going to have to integrate her into society at some point" he says to Hopper. "It's not like I'm saying keep her locked up for a year, just, take it slow, and before you know it, everyone in town will know who she is and have no problem with it. Get her ready for school, take her into town here and there, get her some friends-" Owens begins to list, and Hopper chuckles.

"She's got friends already, they're dying to see her, one in particular" he rolls his eyes. Owens gives him a questioning look, "What kids?" he questions. "Those three boys who found her" he nods his head.

"Ah, I get ya, and there's one in particular?" Owens says with a wide grin on his face. Hopper lets out a long sigh, "Yeah, this is going to be fun, adopting a teenage, telekinetic daughter who happens to have a crush on a boy, so much fun" he says sarcastically. And Owens does a deep belly laugh at his words, while Hopper continues to munch on his sandwich, itching to get home.

He's truly giddy when he pulls up to the cabin a couple hours later, he knows that the girl will already be a little unhappy with him because he left a note saying he'd be home at noon, his clock reads just after two in his cruiser. But, he's pretty sure the news that he has to share will turn her mood right around.

He gives the secret knock, and steps through the door when he hears the locks click open. He looks over to the couch where El sits watching television. He moves to place his hat and jacket on the

hangers, and from behind his back he hears her say, "You're late....again" she says with a heavy sigh.

Hopper moves towards her and sits down on the available couch space, he looks at the girl, trying to contain his excitement, "I know El, I'm sorry, but I've got a good reason for it", he gives her a steady look.

At this El, sits up her attention on him, she gives him a look that is telling him to continue. He pulls the newspaper and envelop from under his arm and gently places them in front of her. She moves to look at the newspaper, "What's this?" she asks, he can tell she's trying to sound out the words in her head.

Hopper can't help but smile now, "This kid", he points to the newspaper, "Is telling us that the lab, the place that hurt you and kept you locked away...is gone, it's getting shut down, they'll all be gone by next week" he explains to her. El's eyes move and lock with his, absorbing his words.

He pulls at the envelop and opens it, laying it down in front of her, "Birth..certi..certifi..certificate?" she sounds out giving Hopper a questioning look, making sure she got it right. He can't help but beam at her, "Yeah, that's it, this...this means that there's proof of your existence, that you can do whatever you want now" he can't help smiling. El looks back down at the paper, "Jane...Eleanor...Hopper?" she throws a look at him, and Hopper nods.

"That's you kid, Eleanor because you go by 'El', but Jane...is the name your mother gave you" he explains. She looks at the certificate again, "Momma, Theresa Ives, Papa...you", she breathes looking up at the man with wide eyes.

He nods, "Yeah, it means that I'm your father, so I can take care of you...if you want and....you'll be my daughter" he shrugs his shoulder.

"Papa?" she questions again. Hopper shakes his head, "How about something different, that was the man who kidnapped you...the man who did all of that horrible stuff to you", he explains.

"Dad?" she quips, Hopper laughs, "You can call me whatever you want kid...just...is this okay...that I'll be your...dad?" he asks gently, meeting the girls eyes.

El seems to take in his words, absorbing everything that has just been laid down in front of her. Her eyes move across the papers her hands gently reaching out and touching them, making sure they are real.

Finally, she raises her head, and her eyes meet Hopper's, instead of answering, she gives a small nod, as a smile creeps onto her face, a tear escaping her eyes. "Dad" she whispers, and then she moves, slowly, and envelopes him in a warm hug. He returns the hug, wrapping his arms around her tiny frame, as a few stray tears stray from his eyes too. He then realizes that the wish he made last night, has come true.

There relationship doesn't change much from there, but he can feel the new nervousness that has developed around them. It seems that they still need to figure out this whole 'father/daughter' thing that is new to both of them.

A day after the exciting announcement, El begins to ask a million questions, most of them involving when she can see her friends. And of course, is the snowball still in the books?

Hopper chuckles when El finally asks in her nervous voice outloud, "Can I...can I go to the snowball...with Mike?" her amber eyes search his. Hopper reaches out and rubs her hair affectionately, "Yeah kid, that means you can go". And he winces as El screeches a very loud girly scream as she jumps up and down in excitement. She gives him a quick hug, and is about to disappear into her room, when Hopper yells out, "Woah, woah, wait!" and El freezes at her door, giving him a curious look.

"Where are you going?" he asks the girl. El shrugs, "To tell Mike" she answers as if it's the most obvious thing in the world. Hopper moves towards the girl as she watches his movements, "Why don't we...surprise him?" he throws the question at the girl.

"Surprise?" she says, the new word foreign to her. Hopper nods his

head, "Yeah, it means to do something unexpectedly, where, Mike will think you won't be coming to the snowball, but then you show up, it'll blow his mind".

El analyzes his words, "But, isn't that mean, and friends don't lie" she says to him firmly. Hopper sighs, knowing that those words ring true for everything she says. He bends down to her level, "Look, I just, want to make sure you are all set and ready to go, and it'll be safer for you to just be there, without him looking around like he's expecting someone. This is still new, and we need to be careful, okay?" he gives the girl a look.

She moves her head to the left and right, thinking his words over, but she finally sighs and nods, "Okay, won't tell Mike" she huffs. Hopper nods, "Thanks kid, and I'll try to get something figured out so that we can get you a dress, shoes and everything else you need". El perks at these words, "Make-up?" the word rolls off her tongue as she gives a hopeful look to the man. He chuckles, "Alright, I'll try to get that too" he sighs, as El smiles brightly again and hops into her room.

Hopper spends the next couple of days desperately thinking of a way to get El the stuff he needs. When he goes into Melvald's to talk to Joyce to figure something out.

"Why not ask Nancy, I mean, that old pink dress El wore last year was hers" Joyce suggests with a happy tone. She was just as excited as he was when he told her the news. She also explains how Mike has been asking about when El will be able to come out of hiding, but, she's always had to play him off, not knowing till now everything that has happened.

Hopper nods at her words, "That's a great idea, I'll swing by the Wheeler's later".

"Uh, you might want to call first, Mike's been chomping at the bit to try to get ahold of you one way or another, and he says that El has been quiet on the whole thing too", she tells the man. Hopper sighs at this fact, "Well, I guess I'll just have to go talk to the girl at the school then" he shrugs his shoulders as he bids Joyce goodbye, ready to head to the school.

It's not hard to find the eldest Wheeler child, and he flags her and Jonathan down when their last bell rings. They have nervous looks on their faces when they approach, "Hi Hopper, everything okay?" Nancy asks quietly, looking around suspiciously.

Hopper nods his head, "Yeah, everything's fine, especially thanks to your article" he smiles at the girl, who lets out a breath of relief. "That's good" she says as she gives him a look, "What are you doing here anyways?" she asks the man, who heaves a heavy sigh, "Well, actually I've got a favor to ask".

It's the day of the snowball, and El can hardly contain her excitement as the day passes. She keeps asking Hopper how much more time, in which he will give her a time, and she'll huff, and pout about until she comes to ask him again.

He knows she's excited, so he tries to contain his annoyance. When four o'clock rolls around, El ushers El to the bathroom to take a shower, explaining that Nancy will be over soon, and she had explicitly told Hopper that her hair would be easier to work with when it was clean.

The eldest female Wheeler had been more than happy to help get the girl ready for the dance, and she said she had the perfect dress and shoes to match for the girl.

So, once El was in the shower, Hopper relaxed against the couch, waiting for the others to arrive. He's dozing off, when a secret knock is heard at the door, Hopper stands, unlocks the latches and pulls open the door, to where Nancy and Jonathan both stand, there arms full with supplies.

"Hey Hopper, is she ready?" Nancy asks bouncing into cabin, Jonathan trailing behind. Hopper gestures his head to the bathroom, "I think she's just about done, if you want to go check on her?" and at his words, Nancy moves with her arms full, towards the door.

She knocks gently, "Hey El, it's Nancy, can I come in, I want to blow dry and style your hair" she says. And El peaks out of the bathroom, allowing the girl to enter. And Hopper watches as the girls disappear

behind the door.

This leaves Jonathan and Hopper to stand awkwardly in the living room. Hopper gestures towards the empty armchair, "Wanna watch something, they'll probably be awhile" Hopper huffs. And Jonathan nods, "Sure, sounds good", as he takes a seat. The men sit in silence as they await for the girls to finish up.

It seems like hours, before Nancy finally opens the door to the bathroom, Hopper shoots his head over to the door, "Are you done, finally?" he asks in anticipation. Nancy smiles broadly, "She is, take a look", and with this Nancy gestures to the door, and Hopper's mouth falls open as he watches El take slow steps out of the bathroom.

Hopper can't believe his eyes, the girl who once sported a shaved head, short hair, was covered in dirt and ratty clothes, stood before him now, her hair tamed, gentle makeup dusted across her eyes, and the simple, yet elegant dress that flowed down her body. She was no longer a scared little girl, but instead a strong, blossoming woman, who was now his daughter.

He stood from the couch and approached her slowly, a smile pulling at the corner of his mouth. El looks up to him with her now even more stunning amber eyes, "Pretty?" she whispers to him. Hopper can't help but chuckle, "Prettiest girl I've ever seen" he says to the girl, who lights up like a christmas tree.

Nancy moves to the girl, "I hope you don't mind, I gave her one of my old bracelets to help cover the tattoo" she gestures to the gold band that wraps around the girls small wrist.

El holds it up for Hopper to see, and it hits him then. He moves his hand and reaches over to his right wrist and pulls off the blue band that has sat there for many years. He holds it out to the girl and places it gently next to the gold band.

El gives him a questioning look. "It was Sara's, I've worn it everyday since the day she...she left" he chokes out as he holds onto his new daughters hand. "You're my daughter now, and I think she would have wanted you to have it" he smiles at her.

He watches as El's eyes water as she moves towards the man and gives him a tight hug, which he returns. Nancy and Jonathan stand to the side, marveling at the sight before them. When, Nancy looks at her wristwatch and startles, "Oh, we've got to get going, we need to get ready too!" she chirps as she heads towards the door.

El moves towards the girl, "Thank you, for all your help" she smiles brightly. Nancy stops and grins at the girl, she hesitantly steps forward and gives the girl a small hug. "Of course, if you ever need to talk about girl things, don't be afraid to ask" she says as she pulls away.

El nods at her words. Nancy takes in the girl one more time, "Mike is going to *flip*, when he sees you, I can't wait to see his face!" she croons to the girl. And at this El flashes brightly at her words. Hopper can't help but roll his eyes.

An hour later Hopper is pulling into the parking lot of the Hawkins Middle School. He decided to come a little later so that El can harmlessly blend into the crowd. He parks the car and lets out a deep breath as he can hear the music pounding against the brick building as lights flash brightly from the windows.

He turns his attention to El who is fiddling lightly with her newly acquired wrist tie. "Hey, you okay?" he checks in with her. El startles and turns to Hopper, she gives him a shrug.

"It's okay to be nervous, you don't have to-" he tries to say but El shakes her head furiously, "No, I want to go in" she says with determination. Hopper smiles at her, as he opens his door, "Let's go then" he states as El copies his movements.

He walks her to the gym door but stops at the door, he looks at her, "Okay, go in, hang up your jacket and just head in, and find Mike, okay, I'll be out here waiting" Hopper explains to the girl.

El nods her head, her curls bouncing as she does so. "And if there's any trouble?" Hopper eyes the girl, but she huffs, "Come outside, find you" she repeats with a strained voice, going over the plan about a million times if something *does* happen.

Hopper nods his head, he pushes the door open for her, "Have fun kid...but not too much fun!" he calls after her as she walks into the gym. He can't help but stand at the door and watch as she effortlessly hangs her jacket with the rest of the kids, as she slowly approaches the door to the gym. She hesitates slightly, but with a determined look, she pushes open the door and heads in.

In his heart, he wishes he could watch her, he wishes he could see the stunned look on her friends faces, especially Wheeler's when she walks in. But, for now, they have no relation with one another, he still has to think of how to explain a one night stand to the rest of the town and how his daughter is now part of his life.

However, for now, he lets out a long breath and moves to the parking lot, where, he spots Joyce and moves to join her.

The air is chilly around them as the night drones on. The music inside thrumming along, giving them something to listen to.

However, two hours later, Hopper notices the music stops, as the gym doors open and kids and teens pool out from the building. Hoppers senses are immediately on high, as he searches the crowd for the girl.

Most of the kids have dispersed among the parking lot leaving with parents or rides to bring them home. However, Hopper has yet to spot El, or the rest of her friends. He feels Joyce stiffen beside him, feeling her worry as well.

But, to his relief, the gym doors open and he spots Nancy and Jonathan leading the group of teens towards them. It takes him a moment to spot El, who walks slower in the very back, and of course, she is with Wheeler. Her head rests gently against his shoulder, as their hands are intertwined together, and beaming smiles are placed on their faces.

He wants to be annoyed, but seeing her so happy, so *normal*, stops him from saying anything. The kids greet him and Joyce. He moves to El, "You have a good time kid?" he asks her. She smiles brightly, as she moves closer to Mike, who blushes in return.

The middle Wheeler child looks up to him, "You really had me fooled, I thought she wasn't coming" he admits. Hopper chuckles, "Well, thought it would be fun, I like to torture you somewhat" he grins at the kid who rolls his eyes.

"So, does this mean El can come out now?" Mike question floats in the air. And not everyone's attention is on him. Hopper sighs, "Well, it's going to be a slow process, and we're going to have to come up with up some rules, just to make sure we're all on the same page".

And on the word rules, all the kids sigh. But Hopper gives them a look, "Hey, I just told you guys that you'll be able to hang out some, take what you can get" he stresses to them, and they somberly nod in return.

"Come on guys, it's getting late" Joyce says as she rubs Will's shoulders affectionately. The kids nod in return as each of them disperse, waving goodbye. Hopper notices however, that Mike still lingers slightly, not wanting to leave El's side.

"Mike, come on we need to go!" Nancy calls from across the parking lot, "I'll be there in a minute!" he calls back as he turns to El, sighing heavily.

El turns and looks at Hopper, and she gives him a look, he gets it. He sighs and rolls his eyes and points at the two of them, "Three minutes" is all he says, as he jumps into the cruiser, his back to the kids.

However, he adjusts his rearview mirror, so that he can see the two of them. He watches as they exchange soft goodbyes. And then El jumps into the boys unexpected arms, hugging him tightly, in which he returns.

El pulls away slightly, and Hopper's attention falls on her eyes, which are mischievous, as he watches in slight shock, as El bends up on her tiptoes and places a gentle kiss on Wheeler's surprised lips.

He's pretty sure his heart stops as he has just witnessed his new daughters first kiss with a boy, in which he's still not sure what is going on between them, but it still surprises him. And he can now

feel the protective dad bubbling in his stomach.

Mike pulls her closer to him, as he moves his head slightly, their kiss continuing. Hopper rolls his head, and the monster finally rears itself to life, "Come on kid, we've got to go!" he barks out the window, startling the two teens from their embrace.

El gives Mike a shy look, as they pull away from one another. El moves slowly towards the other side of Hopper's cruiser, she waves out her window, "Bye Mike, thank you!" she cries out in which he waves back and yells back, "Thank you El, this was the best night ever!" he then chuckles into the night, as El giggles in return.

Hopper rolls his eyes at the two, as he revs his engine, and throws the cruiser into drive, leaving the school parking lot. Hopper glances over to El who is craning her neck out the window, waving vigorously to Mike until she can no more.

She pulls herself back into the cruiser, rolls up her window and sighs delightedly as she sits back against her seat, smiling brightly.

"You have a good night?" Hopper asks the girl. She smiles dreamily to him, "Best night ever" she whispers. Hopper shakes his head, we wants to say something about the kiss he witnessed, but something inside him stops him. He sees how happy she is in this moment, how tonight she got to be just like everyone else.

So, with a long exhale, Hopper holds in his questions for now. Allowing his daughter to be the lovesick teenager that she is.

Holy cow! Another REAAAALY long chapter! Just wanted to get to the snowball! I know there's not a lot of Mileven, but thought the Hopper and El moments were fun to write! But, that means the next chapter will DEFINITELY hold a lot of fluffy Mileven love!

Thank you again for all the love and reviews! I truly appreciate every single one!

So, as always PLEASE REVIEW! They are my fuel for writing!

Until next time, thanks again!

6. The Snowball (Mileven POV)

Alrighty, on to the Mileven chapter! Thank you all for the reviews, and kudos from the last chapter! I always enjoy reading them and seeing that everyone is enjoying this story! Sorry it took me a little longer, with the holidays, and being extremely stressed and having a lot of anxiety, writing has been challenging for me, but excited to be back at it!

P.S: Please take a look at the bottom note on this chapter!

So, on with the next chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Chapter 3.2: Snowball (Mileven POV)

She can feel the old cruiser bump along the road as she watches the trees pass by outside her window. Her eyes grow heavy with fatigue, as she fights to keep them open. She can feel them trying to stay open, but, she finally gives up the fight as she lets her head rest against her hands, her eyes closing firmly shut, as she drifts off to sleep.

She's pretty sure that she falls into a deep sleep almost immediately, allowing the movement of the cruiser to lull her to dreamland. Within her dreamscape she begins to see outlines of her friends, and a mixture of weird odyssey's that begin to play behind her eyelids.

But, all too soon, although in a decent sleep, she feels the movement of the cruiser stop, which stirs her lightly from her dreams. She moves her head to the driver of the vehicle, her eyes bleary from the sleep she so desperately craves. She blinks at him, "Home?" she asks. And at this Hopper gives her a small smile and nod as he opens his door, "Yeah kid, we're home", she hears him say as he steps out from his side of the door.

She listens as he comes to her side of the door, as he pulls her door open, allowing the cool air to hit her skin, she grumbles, really not wanting to move.

However, a gruff voice from her side catches her attention, "Come on E, let's get inside so we can both catch some z's" Hopper whispers to the exhausted girl. She grumbles again, but she forces herself to turn as she tumbles ungracefully out of the cruiser, Hopper barely catches her before she tumbles to the ground, "Whoa there kid, you okay?" he asks her.

Her eyes are barely open, she just *really* wants to curl up in her bed, but she gives a small nod to Hopper's words as he pulls on her arm so that she can get her bearings.

She wobbles slightly on her legs, but Hopper holds her steady, and she's grateful for the support, as he guides them back to their home.

Her eyes fight to stay open as her clumsy feet trip on the smallest roots and rocks that protrude from their well walked path. But, Hopper is there to steady her along the way. And finally, through El's bleary eyes she can see the cabin come into view.

They walk up the creaking steps slowly to the cabin. El feels Hopper shake her slightly to grab her waning attention, "E, you've got to open the door for us" he says quietly.

El sighs, not really wanting to use her powers, feeling drained to the bone to even lift a finger. But, she knows if she wants to get into her bed, she's got to put in some effort. So, with a quick flick of her head, she mentally unlatches the locks from their place.

El feels Hopper's steady hand behind her back as he guides them into the cabin. She closes her eyes quickly once Hopper flicks on the light, she growls to herself at the harshness the lights cast down on her.

El notices that Hopper leaves her side, as she stands wobbling on her feet. After a few moments, he doesn't return so she says, "Hopper?", to gain his attention. She watches as he flips around to observe her. She lets out a long yawn, stretching out her tired limbs. Hopper gives her a warm look as he moves to lead her towards her bedroom. "Why don't you get changed into your pj's, and crawl into bed, I'll pick this place up a bit, okay?" he gives her a small smile.

She can only manage to nod her head in return as she moves towards

her bedroom, shutting the door behind her.

Her eyes immediately fall on the bed that is calling her name, but, the clothes that she borrowed from Will feel heavy on her, and she just wants to feel warm in her own pj's.

So, with tired limbs, she begins to yank off her clothes and replace them with her own, warm pj's. And she sighs at the feeling of contentment that envelopes her once her pj's are on. She then lumbers over to her unmade bed, and collapses onto the bed.

She moves so that she is wrapped tightly in her blankets, and the heat that surrounds her lulls her off to sleep. A soft smile on her face knowing that whatever danger, fear, and anxiety that just surrounded her for the last year, can finally melt away. For, she knows that her friends, and one boy in particular now know she is alive, that she is safe, and that she might be able to have a 'normal' life for once. And with a curly haired boy in the forefront of her mind, El drifts off into a calm sleep.

Not too far away, only a couple of miles from the sleeping girl, an anxious boy fights off sleep as well, as he tosses and turns in his own bed.

His mind won't stop reeling with the thoughts and memories that keep moving throughout his head. He sighs in frustration as he slumps, his back flat against his mattress as she stares up at his dark ceiling.

He wants to go to sleep, but just the thought of the girl he saved a year ago, and disappeared without a trace, was back! Mike couldn't stop pinching himself, checking to make sure that this was all not just a dream, but the last couple of days had actually happened.

He runs a heavy hand through his mop of hair, sighing. Mike wants nothing more than to see El again, and his heart pounds in his chest as he thinks of her. He closes his eyes, and takes her in. The one thing he couldn't believe, but shouldn't have been surprised to see was that El actually had hair.

When they first reunited he was surprised to see her with how her hair was slicked back and straight. But, was even more surprised after she had washed away the hair gel and her curls bounced against her head. He couldn't help but stare at her in awe, in how different she looked, with how much she had grown, and with how much more in that moment she stole his heart.

Then, when she actually wanted to kiss him, that blew him away even more. However, he had no idea *what* they actually were. He knew that his dream would be to ask her out, but worry filled his gut with the fact that she might not understand what a 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' was, and he *really* didn't want to scare her off.

Mike lets out a long breath at this thought, thinking about how he would ask her, or if he even would be able to. But, he knew deep within his heart that there was a special, undeniable connection between the two of them. With his mind still swirling in every different direction, his heavy eyes finally took over, as he fell asleep, his dreams involving a very particular curly haired girl.

She awakens with a start, taking in a deep breath as she blinks in the light around her. She shifts and raises herself to a sitting position, stretching her arms above her head. Her head moves to look out her small window, the one of few that made it through her tantrum.

She peeks through the old, worn pieces of fabric, and she sees that it's pretty light out, meaning that it must be well past morning. She lets go of the fabric, letting it fall back into place.

El moves and places her feet on the cool wooden floor, as she makes her way out into the living room. She can tell almost immediately that Hopper isn't there, for, he's usually clomp around about if he is, or, sitting watching the television.

Her hunch is immediately confirmed when she sees Hopper's note left for her on the table. She reads it slowly, words still tricking her up here and there. But, she is able to read the note, understanding Hopper will be back soon.

She then feels her stomach let out a low growl, and she remembers

how hungry she is. So, she moves to the kitchen, opening the fridge and freezer to examine their contents.

When her eyes do not find the regular knowing yellow box of Eggos in the freezer, she lets out an annoyed huff, remembering that Hopper had thrown out all of her boxes due to her tantrum. She growls lightly to herself, shutting the freezer a little more firmly than need be, as she turns her attention back to the fridge.

There are many bottles of beer, in which Hopper had a lengthy conversation with her about what it was and how it was an 'adult' beverage, and she was not allowed to drink it. Not that El had really cared, she had gotten a whiff of the liquid a couple times and it nearly made her gag each time.

Her eyes continue to scan the fridge, when, near the back, she spots a carton of eggs. She reaches into the depths of the fridge and pulls out the eggs. The carton is almost full, which means they are still fairly new, and good to use.

El lets the fridge door shut behind her as she turns towards the stove. She sets the eggs down on the counter, as she moves about the kitchen collecting butter, a pan and a spatula.

She eyes the stove warily. She has used it before, but, Hopper is usually not too far away. Her mind drifts vaguely to a moment when Hopper was teaching her about lighting the stove and how if left unattended could potentially start a fire, and then burn the house down. She shivers at the thought, but her stomach growls again, and her mind is made up.

So, she turns her attention to the stove, turning the knob just like Hopper said, as she hears the faint clicking and then a 'whoosh!' as the flames ignite. El can't help but smile triumphantly at her success, she moves the knob to lower the flame to a low flicker, remembering that Hopper told her it's better to cook low and slow than fast.

She places the chipped pan over the flames, and tosses a dollop of butter into the pan. It sizzles at it quickly melts away. El eyes the butter, waiting for it to melt away before she cracks her first egg into the pan, and she watches in joy as the egg begins to cook.

El has just cooked up a handful of eggs when she hears Hopper's engine nearby. In no time she hears the familiar knock on the door, and with a flick of her head, the locks are open, and Hopper walks through the door.

Their eyes meet for a moment, but El quickly turns her attention back to the cooking eggs. She pokes at them, checking to see how they are cooking, when she feels a presence behind her. "What'cha cooking kid?" he asks. El shrugs, "Eggs, like you taught me, nothing else for us to eat" she states.

"Us?" he asks her. El moves her head side to side, acknowledging his words. "Knew you didn't eat, figured I'd make something for both of us" she says quietly, her eyes still moving with the eggs, making sure they cook, but don't burn.

He doesn't say anything, so El focuses on the eggs, but then she feels a pressure against her head, and she can't help but smile as Hopper rubs her head affectionately, she can't help but giggle.

After he removes his hand he moves towards the counter, "That's awesome, E, how about we add to this breakfast" he states as he raises the bag in his hand. El gives him a curious look, but through the white grocery bag, she can see a familiar yellow box, and her eyes widen.

"Eggos?" she asks excitedly, all of her attention on the yellow box. She hears Hopper chuckle, "Yeah kid, thought you deserved them, after closing the gate, I don't think you deserve to be grounded" he shrugs his shoulders. El can't help but let out a small squeal of delight as she runs to the man and gives him a tight hug.

She feels so warm and excited in this moment, knowing that things have returned to normal after everything they had endured within the last couple of days.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" she says excitedly as she pulls away, a bright smile plastered on her face, but her attention goes back to the eggs, not wanting them to burn after all of her hard work.

Her hands move the spatula against the eggs, turning them just at the

right time. She hears Hopper chuckle behind her as she hears the familiar sound of the Eggo box opening as she hears him place some into the toaster.

Once the Eggos have been toasted and the eggs are set, El places two eggs on her plate, and three on Hopper's. While he gives her two Eggos and one of his own.

El reaches excitedly for the maple syrup bottle, she begins to swirl the sweet substance over her eggos and then she moves to her eggs, remembering what Mike had taught her. She's focusing on her task at hand until she hears, "You...actually like that? You know the kid ain't here-" Hopper starts, but El shoots him her famous glare, "I like it too, not just because of Mike" she states firmly. Her eyes watch as Hopper holds up his hands in defeat, "Okay, okay, just making sure" he chuckles lightly as he turns to his breakfast, taking a forkful of eggs and placing them in his mouth.

El moves to her own plate, placing a delicious helping of Eggos and eggs onto her fork and placing them delicately into her mouth. She smiles at the sweetness that erupts on her taste buds.

"Wow, good job on the eggs kid" Hopper says as he chews thoroughly, as El tilts her head and gives him a small smile as she continues to dig into her own food. They continue to eat in silence.

Once breakfast has been completed, El had hoped to possibly talk to Hopper about being able to see Mike and her friends again. It had been sitting at the tip of her tongue all morning, but she was afraid to ask after everything that happened.

However, Hopper had quickly asked her to help with getting the glass put back into the windows of the cabin. She ultimately really didn't want to help, but after a few looks from Hopper, she knew she wouldn't be able to get out of it. Instead, residing to help, and maybe afterwards asking him about her friends.

So, they set to work, as El takes down the blankets, and folds them neatly. Once she is done, she moves to assist Hopper with the glass for the windows, helping him hold them in place.

El sighs heavily once the windows have finally been completed. She looks out the new windows to see that the sun has begun to set, she grumbles to herself, hating that she has still yet to ask Hopper about Mike.

She doesn't get a chance to ask, however, as Hopper speaks first, "Alright, why don't you get our dinners warmed up, and I'll finish picking up the mess, yeah?" he asks the girl.

El really wants to talk to Hopper, but she knows she needs to stay on his good side, she she nods her head and says "Okay", as she turns towards the kitchen to get out their usual t.v dinners.

She pulls them out of the typical cardboard boxes, and moves to place the dinners in the microwave. She presses the numbers and watches them rotate within the machine, as she mulls over how she wants to bring up the topic of Mike.

She's lost in her own thoughts when she hears, "El!", through the door, she furrows her brows as she moves towards the door, not knowing Hopper had left the cabin. "Can you open this up for me!?" she hears Hopper's strained voice through the door, as she quickly moves to open the wooden door.

Her eyes fall on the man as he moves through the door, carrying a very large object in with him, his back is bent in a weird way as he maneuvers through the home. She shuts the door after Hopper is all the way through, and she watches in wonder as she inspects the object in his arms.

However, there is something familiar about the object, and she takes in a quick breath in shock as she figures out what it is. A large smile blooms across her face as her eyes follow Hopper as he sets the heavy object on their t.v stand.

Hopper is breathing heavily after the exertion of carrying the t.v., but, El can't take her eyes off of it. She looks to Hopper, "New, for me?" she asks, her eyes searching his. Hopper chuckles, "For both of us kid, I think we deserve it after all we've been through" he says with a shrug of his shoulder.

She watches as he reaches around to the back of the t.v and removes something from the back, he holds it up to El, "It even has a remote" he waves it at her, and she feels her smile grow even more.

She can't contain her excitement any more as she turns to the man, "Can we watch, with dinner?" she asks, her hands coming up, clasped together under her chin, hoping to pull off the look Hopper has called the 'puppy dog look'. Hopper chuckles at her, "Sure kid, just let me get it set up" he states, and El bounds back into the kitchen to get their dinner.

El moves through the kitchen in lightning speed to get their dinner's out of the microwave. However, she burns herself lightly for hastily handling the hot plastic, but, she honestly doesn't care as she places them on a plate, and carries them into the kitchen.

She sets the meals down on the coffee table, as she curiously watches Hopper fix the rabbit ears to the t.v, as it hums to life. But, within moments, a picture pops onto the screen, and El can't believe her eyes.

She gasps, "It's...clear" she says in awe, and Hopper looks down to the t.v himself, "Huh, it is a lot clearer isn't it?" he gives El a smile, as she bounces on the couch, waiting for Hopper to join her, their dinners ready.

El sits silently on the couch as she devours the world of *I Love Lucy*, which is a new show to come through the t.v. The old one was very limited in range, and she was excited with everything else that might be come through the new t.v.

Her eyes are glued to the t.v. as she mindlessly dips her spoon into her bowl of ice cream, placing the sugary sweet into her mouth. A shift on the couch is the only thing that pulls her attention away, her eyes follow Hopper as he stands from the couch and moves towards the cabin door.

"Where are you going?" she asks giving him a curious look. She watches as he throws on his lauffers and points out the door, "Forgot something in the cruiser, will be right back" he states. El merely

accepts his words with a shrug as she flips her head back to the t.v. not wanting to miss anything from the show.

She's so immersed into the show, she barely notices Hopper re-enter the cabin. But, she does tear her eyes away for just a moment, to see that Hopper is holding something behind his back, approaching the girl.

Her curiosity peaks, "What's that?" she nods to what he is holding. Hopper chuckles, "Hold on now, it's kind of a surprise" he states, and this immediately grabs her attention.

"For me?" she asks excitedly, never really having a surprise before. Hopper nods at her, "Yeah, for you kid", he states, moving towards the girl, who is now bouncing in her seat. Hopper sits down next to her, the object still behind his back.

Her excitement is growing within her, truly wanting to know what Hopper is hiding. But, Hopper speaks, "Now, listen kid, I got this for you because I promised I would, and I don't know how long it'll be until everything is in the clear", her eyes catch his, and suddenly she's unsure if she wants to know what this surprise is, but she can see a bit of excitement behind his blue eyes, so she gives him the benefit of the doubt.

When finally, he slowly brings the object from around his back, and when El's eyes catch the very obvious words etched across the surface, her mouth hangs open, as she slowly reaches for it.

Only one words comes from her mouth, "Supercom", she says quietly, her hands move to stroke the box in wonder. She can feel the anticipation within her building. "Yep, and it's an extended range, so, you'll be able to talk to the boy no problem" he says.

Something about Hopper's words catch E, and she moves her eyes to meet his, "Mike, his names Mike, not boy" she gives him a strained look. She has really grown to dislike the way Hopper has come to think of Mike as just 'boy' or 'Wheeler'.

Hopper rolls his eyes at her, "Yeah, yeah, kid, I know", he reaches forward and rubs her head. She can't help but smile at this display of

affection. Ever since her hair had become a curly mess, it was something Hopper always did, and she secretly enjoyed it.

El looks at the man beside her, evaluating her next words carefully in her mind before she speaks, "Can I open it, call him...tonight?"

She watches his movements hesitantly, but to her surprise, he nods, "Go ahead kid, see what the ki-, I mean Mike is up to". El can't contain her excitement as she smiles brightly as she pulls at the tabs of the box and tares into it. Within moments, she withdraws the Supercom from its package.

Her eyes and hands examine every inch of the new device. In her mind, she begins to think of the one Mike has, the one she used to prove that Will was still alive so that the dark haired boy would believe her. His was the one he had called her every night on for 353 days without a moment missed. But now, in her hands, she held her very own Supercom, and her way to communicate with the boy she so desperately wanted to see again.

El is too immersed in looking over the new device, that she barely hears Hopper's next words, "Oh, don't forget these" he waves them up into her face, her eyes furrow in question.

She doesn't know what they are, but Hopper reaches for the device, flips it over, and pops open the something behind the device. She watches the man as he carefully places two small cylinders into the Supercom. After he finishes, he closes the back and hands the device over to El.

As if Hopper can read her mind he fills in her curiosity of what he just did, "It's so it works, you'll have to change them out every once in awhile" he shrugs. However, El is barely listening as she flips the device on and begins to fiddle with knobs. Nothing but static ringing through the device.

"Remember which channel?" Hopper questions the girl, but she nods eagerly, "Yes, eleven" a small smile dances across her mouth as she flips through the channels, finally landing on eleven. Her stomach does a weird flip flopping sensation as she knows she is just a moment away from talking to Mike, she can barely contain her

excitement.

She pulls the antennae from its hold, pulling it straight up, her mind remembering that the rod was used to extend the range. Her hands shake nervously as she holds onto the device in her hands, the static crackling through. And she knows this is her chance, so, just like with Mike's Supercom, she presses down the button, the static ceasing to exist as she opens her mouth and whispers, "Mike?" into the device.

El is half expecting that Mike will respond immediately, however, after about a minute, nothing comes through. Worry rolls through her and she casts a worried look to the man beside her.

She watches as he raises his shoulders easily, "Don't worry kid, he might not be around it". El, however, doesn't believe this as she shakes her head as she presses the button again, "Mike, are you there?" she says, but only static crackles through.

Her face falls, she can feel the tears welling up in her eyes, she looks up at Hopper, "He's...he's not answering" she says quietly. Hopper reaches out and places a gentle hand on top of her own, she sniffles lightly, "Hey, it's still early, he might be having dinner or something, you can keep trying every little bit" he suggests. El really doesn't want to believe that Mike isn't *right* next to his Supercom, that he is busy with something else. Her mind begins to drift to when she went to the school, but before her emotions get the best of her, she heaves a heavy sigh and says, "Okay" in a quiet voice.

She doesn't want to let the new device out of her sight, as she silently wills her voice to carry through the device, she only just wants to hear Mike's crackle through.

She feels a hand on her shoulder, "Let's keep watching the show, it'll take your mind off of it" Hopper suggests as he rearranges himself to turn his attention back to Lucy. El sighs in defeat as she falls back into the couch, the Supercom held tightly to her chest. She refuses to let it out of her sight for a moment.

Although she was greatly immersed in the world of Lucy before Hopper had gifted her the Supercom, the device in her hand grabs her attention every couple of minutes. She can't help fumble with the

radio and as she attempts to contact Mike. El can feel the minutes tick by, like the past year. She feels as if any moment away from Mike means that he is off doing something else, without her, and dread fills her heart.

El keeps trying, not even paying attention to the television any more, but can hear in the distant background that a new show is on, Lucy's nasal voice no longer present. She fiddles with the knobs of the Supercom, whispering Mike's name, desperate for any contact. She refuses to cry, but her eyes grow heavier as each moment passes.

She feels a light nudge in her side, and she startles, turning towards the offender, "Hey, why don't you go brush your teeth and get ready for bed, I know it's frustrating, but if he doesn't answer tonight, I'll be sure to let him know you'll call him by a certain time tomorrow" he tries to reason with her.

She sighs heavily, not wanting to give up just yet, so she flicks the Supercom back on once again, as she whispers out one last time, a wish hanging deep within her words, "Mike, are you there....please" she whispers, but, again, just static returns. She watches the radio with hopeful eyes, but nothing returns, her face falls again, as she feels Hopper gently removing the device from her hand, her eyes meet his as he nods to the bathroom.

She huffs, in distress, standing to her feet, shuffling towards the door, her head hanging low. But, as she approaches the bathroom door, the moment her hand reaches the doorknob a static voice crackles through the small room, when she hears it, "El?" crackles through, and in a heartbeat, El moves away from the bathroom, and swipes the device from Hopper's hand, her heart full once again.

"Mike, is that you?!" she asks excitedly, her face lighting up like a Christmas tree. "Y-Yeah.. I-it's me...El", Mike's line is much more garbled, El frowns slightly, "It's hard to hear you" she states through the Supercom.

"I...c..n....hear...y...perf...ly" just barely comes through, she huffs barely being able to make out Mike's words, but she answers anyways, "Hopper got the extended range" she explains, a smile growing on her face.

"O...a...some!" Mike's voice crackles through, and she can practically see his smile through the Supercom. "Might....n-d...t...get one...too" comes through the line a little better this time. But instead of responding immediately, El begins to concentrate, her mind focusing just a bit more than usual, "How about now?" she asks, as she can feel the blood trickle down her nose.

"Can you hear me?" Mike's voice comes in clear as day now. She can finally hear him, and her heart soars, but she can feel Hopper's eyes on her as he speaks, "El, I don't think-" he starts, but she gives him an exasperated look, "Just a little, not a lot of power" she stresses to him.

She watches as he rolls his eyes, "Okay, but only a little, and when you feel tired, or drained, you need to stop" his eyes become serious. El nods excitedly, but her attention is back to the Supercom, "How was your day?" El chirps through the Supercom.

"It was okay...missed you" Mike's voice is low and quiet. El feels her face fall, hating that he missed her, but she missed him too, so she voices this to him, "Missed you too" she whispers back to him.

There is some kind of connection, some kind of heartfelt wave that washes over her, and she doesn't quite know what it is, but the moment feels intimate, but she can feel the eyes of another washing over her.

Her eyes catch Hopper's watchful gaze, so she stands and moves towards her room, "Where are you going?" she hears him ask behind her. And without giving a ton of care she merely shrugs, and says, "Privacy", as she shuts the door behind her. Missing the wild look Hopper gives her as she disappears behind the door.

She feels some relief as she knows that there is a wall giving her some privacy between what she wants to talk to Mike about, without Hopper listening to their every words.

El moves towards her bed, and flops down, she's about to speak through the device again, when Mike beats her to it, "You still there?" she can hear the worry in his voice, so she quickly answers him, "Yes, sorry, moved to my room so that I can have privacy" she says.

Mike responds seconds later, "So, you have your own room?" his voice sounds excited but anxious all at the same time. And El can very much match the same feelings, "Yes, the cabin is small, but nice for me and Hopper".

"I uh..." Mike starts on his end, and El can tell that he is still nervous, "I can't wait to see it one day" he finishes. El beams at the Supercom as if it were Mike she was holding in her hands.

"I want you to see it too, not a lot of stuff like yours, but....home" she whispers. The line is dead for a couple of seconds, but then she hears Mike's voice appear once again, "I'm glad you're safe El, it was...." he cuts off, and El waits for him to finish. "It was *so hard* not knowing what happened to you" El can hear the sadness in his voice, which makes her sad too.

"I didn't like seeing you sad" her voice quavers slightly. She listens as Mike coughs lightly before his next words, "Yeah, there were some days that were worse than others".

El's about to speak, but Mike beats her "Hey, El?" his voice is questioning. "Yes, Mike?" she responds. "What...what *did* happen to you, after the demogorgon and...everything?" he asks.

El takes a deep breath, knowing that this was going to be one of his first questions. She presses the button down on the Supercom slowly as she opens her mouth to speak, "I...I woke up in the upside down....I called to you...but you weren't there".

She releases the Supercom button, taking a breath before she continues, "I ran around for a bit, calling to you, hoping you'd hear me when....when I found a portal, I was able to get through it and made it back to the school" she explains.

"So...you were there shortly after?" Mike's voice perks up in interest. "Yes" El whispers, "But, bad men were still there, had to wait" she says slowly.

"I went to your house, but there were so many cop cars, and there was a woman talking to you-" she starts, but she can hear the crackling of Mike trying to speak through the device, so she lets go of

her button, allowing him to speak, "Wait! Were you looking in the window!" his voice is firm and determined.

El sighs heavily before pressing her button down, "Yes, you were talking to a lady, she was telling you I wasn't safe, that I was dangerous, and you told her that you wouldn't tell her where I was" she can feel her voice shaking as she tries to hold back her tears.

"El" Mike breathes through the device, "I...I thought I saw you but...." his voice trails off, and for a moment, neither of them speak.

But, Mike breaks the silence, "El, just so you know, I didn't trust that woman, I didn't believe a word she said, I know who you are El, and you would do anything to protect me...and our friends".

El lets out a sob of disbelief at Mike's words, knowing that they are true, but after everything she has been through, he has been the one person who has always trusted her. She presses her button down to respond, she sniffles, "Mike, I didn't want to leave, but...didn't want to put you and everyone in anymore danger".

"Are you crying?" are Mike's next words, which startles El a little, she responds with a meek, "Yes".

She listens as Mike sighs through the Supercom, "I wish I was there with you El, to comfort you, I don't want you to be sad" his voice is a whisper, but the sincerity behind his words make El feel warm.

El giggles lightly, "I wish you were here too, your hugs are always nice" she states truthfully, and she's pretty sure that if Mike were sitting right beside her, his face would be in a full blush, just like when she had given him a peck on his cheek in front of their friends.

She hears Mike chuckle, "I'm glad you like my hugs, you're the only girl I've ever well...hugged" his voice sounds strained and unsure.

But, there's something about his nervousness that excites El somewhat, and it brings a giddiness into her soul, and she likes to tease the boy, "What about mom, Nancy?" she questions.

Mike laughs through the Supercom, "Well, there family, it's different with you".

Her brows furrowed, "Different how?" and El can't help but have a moment of dejavu of when she and Mike were sitting in the cafeteria about a year ago, when he desperately tried to explain the snowball to her, and that you go with someone you 'like'. And El knew she liked Mike very much, but there was something between the two of them that was different, and she believed that whatever he had tried to explain to her that night was not easy.

"Uh.." crackles through on Mike's end, and she can't help but smile, knowing they are about to return to the topic of where their last real conversation left off.

She hears him sigh before he begins to speak, "El, remember in the cafeteria, where I tried talking to you about 'more than friends'?" He asks the girl.

El nods to herself, but then remembers, Mike can't see her, so she presses the button quickly and responds with "Yes, I do".

"Well, it's kind of the same thing, you and I...I mean...I think...I'm uh...geez" El can hear him getting flustered on his end. She smiles and decides to put the boy out of his misery, "Mike, it's okay, you don't have to explain it now" she says through the device.

"But, I-" he tries to get through, but El beats him, "No, Mike it's okay, you can explain it to me another time, when we're together again" her voice raises in hopefulness.

"When is that anyways?" Mike's voice is soft. El frowns to herself, "Soon", is all she says. And she's pretty sure Mike can read between these lines, "It better be soon, one day and I don't not like seeing you" Mike explains.

El's heart flutters happily in her chest at his words, "You mean that?" she can't help but ask. Mike chuckles lightly, "Of course El, 353 days without each other, one crazy day of 'what ifs', and only one day to see each other it's...well...it's hard", he chokes out.

And El very much understands the meaning behind Mike's words, having been separated for so long has made them both yearn for one another, and now that they both know that each are okay, one day

together doesn't seem like enough.

"I don't like it either", her voice heavy. And a pregnant pause fills the space between them, but then something peaks its way into her mind, so she says one word through the Supercom, "Snowball?"

"The snowball, what about it?" Mike's voice teems with anticipation. El shrugs to herself, "You said we could go to the snowball together".

"Of course El! I'd love to still take you!" his voice is full of excitement, which makes El smile, "When is it?" she asks through the device.

"It's in a month" Mike's explains. El nods, "If Hopper says yes, can we go...together?" she can't help the nervousness that is etched into her words.

"El, of course, there's no one else I'd rather take, and I promised you, I don't want to go back on that promise" Mike's voice is soft and steady, and it warms El throughout her whole body.

She shivers lightly in anticipation, "I will have to ask Hopper, I hope he says yes".

Mike chuckles again, "Me too, El", she can hear the smile in his voice. He then begins to explain the process of the snowball, how the gym is decorated, the music you dance to and so on. And the night continues on as they both exchange words that had hung so long between them. In this moment they are able to reconnect, even if it is through a small device. But, each of them hold onto their Supercom as if it were the most valuable thing on earth, because to them, it was.

El could literally listen to Mike talk all day everyday, if it meant that she could hear his infectious laugh, or the way he talked about her. There was just something behind his words that drew her into him even more, and she couldn't wait to see him again.

She's laying on her back, the Supercom clenched between her two hands as Mike finishes telling her a story about what Dustin had done a couple months ago in school. He's laughing through the device, and can barely say a word, but El loves every minute of it, as she laughs

along with him.

She is so immersed in their own little world, she barely notices her bedroom door opening, Hopper standing within the frame. She decides to ignore him, but he clears his throat, trying to get her attention, so she flips her head to him and whispers a quick, "What!?" to him.

Her eyes follow him as he approaches her bed with a quick eye roll, "It's a school night, time to say goodnight, okay?" he gives El a firm look. However, a burst of retaliation soars through her as she lifts her body off the bed, "But, Mike-" she tries, but Hopper shakes his head, stopping her words in place, "No buts kid, there will be some rules about the Supercom" he gestures to the device, which crackles in her hands, "El, you still there?" Mike's voice comes through.

El huffs, "Yes, Hopper says you have school, so I have to let you go" she says sadly. "What, I don't usually go to bed till like...ten!" he states, and at this El goes to speak to Hopper, but he moves instead pulling the device from El's hand and speaks clearly, "Listen kid, you and El can talk everyday through this device when you get home from school, but, you've got to make sure you're still hanging out with your friends, doing homework, etcetera, if you want this to work" he pauses, giving El a look. "You'll need to take breaks here and there for dinner and stuff, and you can talk after, okay?" he asks through the device, and then looks down at El, giving her the same questioning look.

She huffs, folding her arms across her chest as she sighs an, "Okay" at the exact same time Mike's "Okay" comes through the Supercom. Hopper nods, seeming satisfied, as he hands the device back to El, "Ten minutes, then say goodbye" he gives a firm look to El, who smiles and turns back to the device. However, she waits until Hopper has fully left her room, the door shutting behind him, before she responds to Mike.

"Sorry Mike, Hopper is...strict" the word falling off her tongue with practiced ease. Mike laughs through the Supercom, "It's okay El, I hate it when my parents can be like that too, but I guess it just comes with the territory".

El huffs, "Don't like all these rules" she says to Mike. "I know, I don't either, and I haven't fully accepted the fact that he kept you hidden from me for a whole year....he could have trusted me", his voice is low.

El frowns at the device, "I wish you could have known too, wouldn't have been so alone" she says sadly.

Mike's voice crackles through, "Well, now that you have a Supercom, I promise I'll call you everyday, okay, maybe even in the morning before I go to school" he says with a chipper attitude.

El smiles at the device, "I'd like that, what time does school start?" she asks curiously. "I'm usually up by seven or so" Mike's voice is casual, and El opens her mouth in shock.

"That's early" she says, and Mike responds with a quick laugh on his end, "It's not too bad, that's what weekends are for, sleeping in".

El giggles along with him, "I hope I get to go to school with you all" she says hopefully. "Me too, El, that would be amazing to see you everyday".

El beams in delight at Mike's words, as she sighs to herself, "Well, it's been almost ten minutes, I'm sure Hopper will be pounding down my door" she jokes.

Mike laughs in return, "Yeah, I have to get ready for bed too, I'll talk to you tomorrow, okay El?" Mike's voice crackles a bit more, as El can begin to feel the strain on herself.

"Yes, call tomorrow" her excitement bleeding through her. "Okay, well, goodnight El, sweet dreams" he whispers to her, which makes her heart swell, "Goodnight, Mike, sweet dreams to you too" she responds, really not wanting to put her device away.

"Goodnight" Mike whispers again, she smiles and responds with a "Goodnight" again, with a smile on her face. And this time, the line goes silent, as El flicks off her Supercom.

She places the new treasure right next to her on her bedside table as she curls up into her blankets, staring at the device. Her heart is

warm and full, knowing that Mike is only a push of a button away.

He awakens to the chirping of his bedside alarm. It barely breaks through his sleep laden eyes, but the noise becomes obnoxious enough, for his brain to realize he needs to turn the damn thing off.

Grunting, he rolls over, twisted in his warm sheets, Mike reaches over and slams a hand down on his alarm, freezing the noise. He lays immobile for a while, just laying there, his eyes still heavy with sleep, as he tries to sit up, but the exhaustion that still seeps through him begins to win over.

However, a particular thought pops into his head unexpectedly, and he raises himself up quickly, and moves to grab onto his Supercom, excitement running through his veins.

Mike quickly pulls the antennae from its holster and pushes it upwards, he fiddles with the dial, as static crackles through. He pushes the button down to speak, however, as he goes to open his mouth, he freezes, his eyes zeroing in on the time. 6:30 flashes at him in bright red letters, he sighs.

He knows that she is probably still asleep, for she is not used to have to getting up so early in the morning. *But*, his mind reminds him, *she wanted you to call her*, taunts through his head. And now Mike is even more confused as to what he should do.

Instead of doing anything, he sits on his bed with the Supercom crackling in the palms of his hand. He eyes his clock once again, the numbers now reading 6:38.

"Okay", he whispers to himself, as he pulls the Supercom closer to his face as he gently pushes the button down, and whispers, "Eleven?" into the device.

He knows she won't respond immediately, but he has reasoned with himself that he will try three times, and if she doesn't respond, then he will try once more after he is ready for school.

So, he impatiently allows a minute to pass, and he tries again, "El,

you awake?" he tries again through his device. He waits in silence, but he hears nothing.

However, just before he is about to press the button down once again for his third and final time, a crackling voice comes through the other end, "Mike?" El responds, and Mike can't help but allow the grin that comes over his face.

"Yeah, El, it's me good morning" he says delightfully. It takes a moment for El to respond, "Good morning to you too, it's early" she yawns through, making Mike chuckle to himself.

"I know, I debated on calling you or not" he answers. "Glad you did, I like hearing your voice", her voice is soft and heavy with sleep. Mike can feel his heart racing in his chest just at hearing her speak. He wants to talk more but his eyes move to his clock once again as 6:48 now flashes at him.

He sighs, "I'm sorry I woke you up just to say hi, but I've got to get ready for school". El's small voice carries through, "It's okay Mike, it's worth it, I'll talk to you later?" she asks.

Mike nods eagerly to no one but himself, "Yeah, definitely, once I'm done school, okay?"

"Okay" El answers simply. "Have a nice day El, I...I'll talk to you later" Mike stutters, but he can practically see the smile on El's face as she answers back, "Have a good day too, Mike, I'll miss you".

And like that, his heart breaks silently, as he whispers back, "I'll miss you too", which ends their morning conversation.

Mike pushes the antennae back down into his Supercom, as he sighs heavily, placing it back on his night stand. He moves away from it, but the device stares at him as if taunting him. But, with a steady mind, he breaks away, and begins to get ready for school.

As with every morning, Lucas is waiting at the end of his driveway for Mike, who has just exited his home, as he gathers his backpack and bike.

He pushes off lightly and moves to his friend. "Hey", Lucas nods to Mike, "Hey", Mike's voice is softer than he intended, and Lucas catches on quickly, as they begin to pedal towards school.

It doesn't take him long to comment, "What's wrong, Mike?" Lucas continues to pedal next to the dark haired boy who merely shrugs. Lucas huffs and rolls his eyes in annoyance, "Seriously dude? You know she's okay, you can't be *that* depressed anymore".

Mike shoots him a look from his bike, "Shut it Lucas, it's...it's hard" he tries to explain, frustration rising through him. Lucas remains silent for a moment before speaking, "When can we see her again?"

Mike shrugs, "Don't know, it's always up to Hopper, but...I did speak to her last night, and this morning, Hopper got her a Supercom" he can't help but smile at this small fact.

"What!? That's awesome, so we'll be able to talk to her all the time then!" Lucas shouts excitedly. But, Mike shakes his head sadly, "I mean, sometimes we can talk to her, but we still have to be careful, you know?" he throws a look to the other boy, as he whips his dark unruly hair out of his face as the cool wind hits them as they continue down the road.

The boys remain silent for the rest of their journey. They pull up to the bike rack, where Dustin and Will stand waiting for them, chatting idly.

They each lock up their bikes and join the other two. "Hey guys, what's up?" Dustin grins at them. Mike shrugs, and keeps his head turned to the ground.

"What's up with him?" he half whispers to Lucas, who rolls his eyes. "He's just sad about El", he says nonchalantly, as Mike shoots him a look, and gives him a quick whack against his arm.

"Ouch, dude, seriously!?" Lucas growls at the other boy as he rubs his shoulder. Mike scoffs, "We have to be careful talking about...you know who...while we're at school", his voice is just above a whisper.

Lucas rolls his eyes once again, "Whatever, it's not like we were loud".

And now it's Mike's turn to roll his eyes and shake his head at his friend. "Whatever guys, let's just head in" he says grumpily as he turns towards the middle school.

He hears the others turn towards him, but then he hears, "Uh, you go on ahead", and Mike turns to look behind him, Will and Dustin behind him, do the same.

All of their eyes fall onto Lucas who stands fidgeting, shifting his eyes through the crowd. "Why aren't you coming?" Will asks. But, Lucas merely shrugs, "Just...waiting", and at this Mike curls his fingers into a fist, "Yeah, okay, waiting for Max, that is" he says just loud enough, for Lucas to hear him.

Their eyes meet from across the way, and Lucas gives Mike a hard stare. But, Mike can honestly not care, his mind is elsewhere, and fixated on a certain girl. And before anyone can say anything else, Mike turns on his heel and heads inside.

His mind fumes slightly, irritated at the fact that well...he wasn't fully sure, but deep within his mind, Mike knew he had a twinge of jealousy of the fact that Max and Lucas could hang out together freely. They didn't have a whole year apart from each other, they didn't have limited times they could talk, they didn't have a part of the government breathing down their necks.

To Mike, Max and Lucas had it easy. No, they hadn't been deemed a 'couple' per say, but Mike and the others could see the neutral attraction between the two of them. And Mike silently wished that what *they* had, is what he and El could enjoy together, but...that was something he didn't know *could* happen between them. And if it were a possibility, he didn't know *when* it would happen.

Mike continues to stew over everything in his mind, blindly making his way to his locker, opening it up, and grabbing his necessary books for the day. He crams them into his awaiting bag with a bit more force than he means to.

He barely notices that a presence stands near his side. "Mike?" the quiet voice quips to him, startling him slightly out of his rage. The boy turns and sees that a hesitant Will stands, shifting side to side,

gauging Mike's reaction.

Mike can't help but soften slightly hearing his friend speak, his dark eyes search the smaller boys. "Are you okay?" Will asks with raised eyebrows.

Mike evaluates the boys question. He huffs, shutting his locker, and hiking his now very heavy backpack onto his shoulders. "I'm...whatever" he spits out, not really feeling like talking. But, Will doesn't budge, catching Mike's shoulder just as he is about to turn away.

Mike gives him a look, "What, Will?!" he can't help but sethe slightly. And at this Will furrows his brows, "You know, we're trying to help you out here Mike, it doesn't help that even after everything that's happened, even though...*she's* back, you're still kind of gloomy".

He listens to his friends words, taking them in, but he's still seething slightly. However, the worried look that is on his friends face pulls him back slightly. So, he lets out a long breath, and looks anywhere but Will, "It's...it's hard to explain" is all he is able to get out.

Will chuckles at this, which pulls Mike's attention back to him, giving him a tight look. "Mike, I'm here if you need to talk", the boy offers. Mike searches Will's eyes, and he knows that he is being truly honest, but....

He's unable to speak his next words, when an unsuspecting arm is thrown around his shoulder, startling him, "Yeah Mike, like Will the wise said, we're here if you need us", Mike catches Dustin's smile.

"Yeah, we're all here", Mike turns to see that Lucas and Max have joined in on their small huddle. Mike can't help but flush at the closeness between all of them, and in the fact that all of their attention is on him.

But, looking at each of their faces, Mike can see that there is a lot more to their words and the meaning behind them. So, instead of stomping off like he had been doing for the last year, Mike lets out a long sigh, "Okay...I'll talk with you guys" he shrugs, and his friends all give small silent cheers, as Dustin hugs him closer, "Alrighty then!

We've got an hour free before our first class, let's go to the A.V room!", and before Mike can protest, he feels himself being dragged through the hallways to their favorite hang out spot.

Once they are all in the tight space, Lucas moves to flick on the dim lights overhead, as each of them move to find a spot to sit. Mike finds an old chair behind the new heathkit that Mr. Clark had ordered to replace the one El had accidentally caught on fire.

As he sits in the chair, his mind flashes to El sitting in the very same spot, in her pink dress and blonde wig, attempting to contact Will. He can't help but smile at the memory, knowing she was here.

"Alright then Mike, spill!" Dustin shouts through the small room, which startles all of them, each of them giving the curly haired boy a look.

"Don't have to let the whole school know, Dustin!" Mike bits back at his friends forwardness, but the said boy merely shrugs as he makes himself comfortable, all eyes now on Mike.

He can feel the tension, the anxiousness that floats through the room, as they wait for him to speak. Mike swallows hard, not really liking being put on the spot. But, after seeing his friends concerned looks, he feels that they do need *some* kind of explanation.

So, he takes in a deep breath, looking down at his hands, he speaks, "It was just so hard, guys, not knowing what happened to her, not knowing if she was dead or alive" he begins, his eyes not moving from his lap, but he can feel his friends eyes glued to him.

"She...we...had something, a connection, and when she was gone...it was like everything fell apart" his voice is heavy. He takes a moment to pause, and finally lifts his head to see his friends giving him sad looks. And this makes him roll his eyes, "Guys, seriously, you don't have to look at me like I'm some sob story".

Will huffs, "It's not like we mean to Mike, but it is a sad story, I mean...when I came to in the hospital and you guys told me about everything that happened, it wasn't hard to tell that El meant

something to you".

Mike freezes in his spot, "What do you mean?" he questions quietly. But at this Dustin, Lucas and even Max laugh. "Dude, it was *very* obvious that you had a crush on her the second you let her spend the night at your house" Lucas voice rings through the small room.

Mike can feel his face flush. "Yeah, I mean, all you cared about was her for that whole week" Dustin chimes in.

"And, even *I* could tell through Lucas's first explanation of everything, and the moment you began to talk about her that she was special to you" Max throws in.

Mike allows for each of his friends words sink in. He had honestly believed that he had hid the fact that he had *liked* El, he knew that he had gotten somewhat gloomier and quick tempered in her absence. But, he hadn't believed his friends had picked up on the fact that he did have a crush on El.

The look on Mike's face must have had his emotions written all over them, because all of his friends are now laughing at him. He can feel his face deepen in color. "But, how...?" Mike tries, but his friends jump in.

"Come on Mike, the way you always talked about her, the way you were calling her each night..." Dustin begins to list off, and in an instant Mike is on his feet, "You heard me?!" he cries more in embarrassment than anger.

Dustin nods, and even as Mike moves around to his two other male friends, they nod too. "Yeah, I mean, sometimes we heard you talking in the fort as we made our way downstairs, or sometimes we would just so happen to stumble on channel *eleven*, which you were *always* on", Dustin stresses.

Mike can't believe his ears, and to his disbelief, all year, when his friends were trying to reach out to him, they *had* understood how he felt.

Will moves to stand closer to Mike, "We knew it wasn't *just* because

some random girl who you guys found in the middle of the woods had disappeared into thin air, we *knew* there was an underlying reason as to why you were so bound and determined to reach out to her", Will explains.

Mike looks down to his scuffed shoes, and he is in honest shock to what his friends have to say. "So you guys knew...that I kind of...liked her then" he whispers into the room.

Lucas scoffs, "Uh, it wasn't just *obvious* it was written all over your face". Mike nods at his words, "Guess I'm not that good at hiding emotions then".

And at these words his friends laugh once again, "You, hiding your emotions? Psh, you display them as if they were a lighted billboard" Max speaks up, and Mike shakes his head at her.

"Whatever guys, if your just going to poke at me and laugh-" he begins to move and grab his bag, but a hand on his arm stops him. The room has fallen silent of laughter, and now all of his friends are looking at him with sincerity.

"Mike", Will starts, "It's only because you were kind of the first of us to actually *have* a crush, and someone you pined for".

Mike gives him a wild look, "What I mean is, anytime you spoke about El, anytime her name was mentioned, hell, even the number, your face got either all hopeful and full of love, or sadness of knowing she was gone washed over you", Will says quietly.

"It was actually cool to hear you talk about her, I mean, you did have the most interactions with her" Dustin shrugs, as he fiddles with a loose string on his corduroys.

"I mean, she had a shaved head, and everything, yet...there was still something that drew you to her" Lucas gives him a knowing look, and at this Mike sighs.

"It wasn't even that she had powers, she was just..." Mike begins to think of the girl, her bright brown eyes full of curiosity and wonder, her small smile, all of it made his heart sing in a way that no other

girl had.

Mike's smile pulls onto his face, "She just...her eyes...her smile...her curiosity, and her kindness and willing to want to help us, even after I yelled at her...*twice*", he admits bitterly.

"She always just gave me the same look, that she trusted me no matter what, that she wanted me to trust her, and...when she disappeared, all I could think of was all of the stuff she didn't get to do, all of the stuff I didn't get to show her, it broke me" he whispers looking down again, as he fiddles with his fingers.

He listens to his friends sigh in understanding, and he soon feels a hand on his shoulder, he turns to look at Will, who's giving him a hopeful smile. "She's alive Mike, and someday, she'll have the freedom we all do, and you'll be the one to show her all of those things".

"Yeah Mike, I mean, you've got to explain to her just about everything, and you better make a move before someone else swipes her up" Dustin teases him, while Mike scowls at him, shaking his head, "El's not like that, she knows how I feel, I mean even when we kissed in the cafeteria-!" the words come streaming out of his mouth faster than his brain can process, and he freezes in his tracks, all of his friends gasping at him.

"You kissed her!?" Lucas all just about shouts at him. As the others look on in shock.

Mike's pretty sure his face is about a thousand times redder than it previously was, at his friends remain quiet, gapping at him.

Will finally breaks the silence, "Did you?" he pushes. And Mike can't hide it now, so he lets out a *very* long breath, his eyes once again fixated on the ground before he mutters, "Yes", and his friends immediately yell out.

"I so told you, I did!" Dustin jumps down from his spot pointing a finger in Lucas' direction. "I didn't think he'd have the courage too!" Lucas retaliates, as they are now freaking out about Mike's declaration.

The boy in question only shakes his head, and hides his face in his hands. He listens to his friends bicker back and forth on the matter, until he feels a hand on his shoulder. He turns his head slightly to look at Will, whose giving him a soft look. "Mike, they're just teasing" he tries to calm his friend.

Mike huffs as he looks up at his friends and finally speaks, "I don't get what's the big deal" his words just barely reach his friends, who then turn and sputter at him, "Not. .Deal!?" Dustin enunciates each of his words.

"Mike, are you kidding me, you're the first one of us to kiss a girl, and not just *any* girl, but a telepathic, kick-ass girl, that we found in the woods!" his words are quick as he throws his arms up in exasperation.

Mike rolls his eyes at his friend, "Yeah, well, it kind of sucked, I didn't even really get to explain it to her, because then the lab guys busted in, we had to run, then she disappeared for a year".

His friends take in his gloomy look and soften, Dustin approaches him, "Mike, it's obvious you both have feelings for each other, I mean, you also *slept* together too" Dustin nudges Mike in the ribs.

"It wasn't like that! We slept *next* to each other, idiot!" Mike barks out his next words, not wanting the others to think he would do anything with El that she didn't want, or maybe even understand.

Max rolls her eyes, "No duh, but Mike, you've got to lighten up, now that El's back, and she will be apart of society at *some* point, it's not like you two won't be a thing, right?" she questions the boy.

But, then it hits Mike in that moment, he never really *did* explain to El the concept of what a boyfriend and girlfriend were, and...were they? His mind began to go a million miles a second. But, a quick snap of fingers in front of his face pulls him out of his racing thoughts.

His eyes meet Lucas', "You've got to stop spacing off like that", he shakes his head. Mike sighs, "I...I don't even know if she knows what a boyfriend and girlfriend are" he admits.

"Wait, so are you going to ask her then?" Dustin moves closer to Mike, giving him an excited look. Mike shrugs his shoulders, "I mean...maybe, but...not over the Supercom, it has to be in person".

"What about the snowball?" Will's voice perks up, and all eyes are on him. "Like Hopper would ever let her come" Mike says sadly.

"We don't know that, maybe she'd be able to come out for the night?" he shrugs his shoulders.

"That's, actually not a bad idea" Dustin says looking to the dark haired boy, who slumps his shoulders. "Guys, I don't know, I don't want to get her hopes up...or mine" he whispers.

His friends stand around in silence, not really sure what to say. "I'm sure Hopper isn't *that* cold hearted, I'm sure he'd let her out for one night" Max states firmly with her arms crossed in front of her.

Mike eyes her carefully, as he pushes off from the counter he is leaning against, he bends down to pick up his bag, shrugging it onto his shoulders. "Look, I appreciate talking you guys, but, it's also hard to talk about El, not knowing when the next time I-we, will see her, besides, it's time for first period", and before any of his friends can retaliate, the warning bell rings throughout the hallway, and Mike disappears into the hallway.

The friends let out frustrated sighs, "We're going to get them together, no matter what it takes" Dustin's voice is determined and firm. The others eye him cautiously, but Will moves forward, "Yeah, she'll make it to the snowball, I know Hopper will let her go, and that's when we'll get them together" he smiles brightly.

"Alright, guess we've got a plan to prepare" Lucas shakes his head, but they all nod in agreement, as they follow through the door where Mike had just left.

El sighs heavily as she lays on the couch, watching the new t.v, which was exciting at first, seeing a much clearer and bigger screen, but it once again became an aspect in which was redundant.

Not only that, but, the ticking clock that hung on the wall nearby didn't help either. She casually glanced at the clock every couple of minutes, willing the time to go by faster. But, to her dismay, the clock never ticked any faster.

Her eyes flick to the clock once again, which read 2:58, and she knew Mike would be home soon, and she couldn't wait to hear from him.

She turns over on her side, her eyes focusing back to the show, but she watches mindlessly, not really caring what happens. Her eyes begin to grow heavy, and before she knows it, she's out.

"El?" she hears her name like it's being called from a far away place. She stirs slightly, but doesn't move, feeling comfortable where she is. "El!!!l" she hears her name again, although more crackly this time.

Her eyes peer open, annoyed at whatever was calling her name. But, then she hears it once more, "El...are you there?", and quickly she realizes just what she is hearing, her Supercom sitting a couple inches away on the coffee table. Sleep dissipating from her like lightning, she sits up and grabs the Supercom.

"Mike?" she whispers through the device, and Mike's relieved voice returns, "Oh, hey El, I was afraid you couldn't hear me or something".

El shakes her head to herself, smiling at the device, "Sorry, fell asleep waiting for you to call". The line is quiet for a moment, "I'm sorry El, I got home as soon as I could, told the guys I wanted to talk to you", Mike states.

"No, it's okay Mike, it's...just boring here, alone" her voice is slightly heavy. She listens to Mike breath into the device before he speaks, "I wish we could see you, so you wouldn't have to be alone".

"Me too", El says back. The line is quiet again for a moment, before El speaks, wanting to hear Mike's voice, "So, how was your day?" she asks, which quickly throws Mike into a spur of how his day was. El's smile grew bigger with each passing minute, satisfied with the fact that she could actually answer Mike, and not just sit there and watch him talk to her, desperately wishing that she would just speak back to him.

They continued back and forth, until Hopper came home and declared it was time for dinner. And although both hesitated in hanging up their devices, they both knew that the other was safe, that they would talk soon. And this interaction continued on for many weeks to come.

It had been a couple weeks since Hopper had given El her Supercom, and every morning and night, Mike was sure to contact El, everyday. Their conversations became deeper, as they began to learn more about each other. Mike learned that El had quite the sweet tooth, and very much enjoyed chocolate ice cream.

He learned that she loved to put puzzles together, and read the books that Hopper would bring her. Mike loved the way she talked about her books, about her daily life, which to her, was boring, but to him, it gave him a small window into her life, into who she was, and he was thankful for that.

But, also as the weeks passed, so did his yearning of wanting to see her again. It had been too long, and he could feel his hand itching to hold hers, to look into her golden brown eyes, and just hold her close. And with each passing day, it meant it was another day closer to the snowball, which neither of them had brought up in their conversations.

His friends however, didn't let a day pass for him to forget. He tried to tune them out, not wanting to listen to their hairbrain scheme of trying to get he and El together. In Mike's own heart, he just wished she'd just be able to come to the snowball, he didn't care if he got a moment to ask her out, he just wanted to see her, and it made his heart ache.

So, after many days of his brain fighting his heart, he decided it was probably time for him to confront Hopper about his promise of bringing El to the snowball. With it only being a couple weeks away, he figured it would be better to ask sooner rather than later. So, with the only tiny bit of courage he was able to muster, he told his friends he would see them later, as he made his way to the police station.

Mike ran the words over and over again in his mind, wanting to

make sure he said what he wanted to just right. He honestly didn't want to make a fool of himself, especially in front of Hopper.

As he pulls up to the well known station, he can feel his heart in his chest as it beats quickly against his ribcage. He sets his bike into the nearby bike stand, as he heads inside.

Once he enters the facility, the smell of stale cigarette smoke and musty papers hit his nose, and he can't help but scrunch it in disgust. He attempts to act cool as he approaches the old woman at the receptionist desk.

He walks to it slowly, the woman barely gives him a glance, "Yes?" she says in an annoyed voice. Mike clears his throat, "Oh, uhm, I was just wondering if Chief Hopper was here...I uhm...I need to talk to him" he manages to get out.

The woman looks up from her papers and gives him a tired look, "What do you need him for?" she gives him a poignant look.

Mike sighs, "Look...can you just let him know I'm here, I *really* need to talk to him" he strains, trying to give the woman his most sincere look.

She looks him over once again, and sighs, "Alright, come through here, and I'll let him know you're here".

Mike breathes a sigh of relief as he follows the ladies instructions and moves around the desk. She follows him to a nearby door, cracking it open slowly, "Hop, someone's here to see you".

Mike waits patiently, waiting for Hopper to tell him to scram off, however, that never comes, and he's a bit surprised when he hears, "Let 'em in", from his semi-opened door, which the woman steps away from and Mike moves through it. He gives her a small thanks, which she reciprocates with a nod.

She shuts the door behind her, and Mike finds himself alone, with the girl he *really* likes parental figure sitting across from him. He shuffles in slightly, swallowing his breath. He's about to speak but Hopper beats him to it, "What do you want?", his voice is thick with

tiredness, not even looking up to acknowledge his presence.

But, at this moment he doesn't care, so he clears his throat and speaks. Hopper listens as the presence clears his voice and says, "Uh, Hopper, it's me". And, as his voice trickles to the man sitting behind his desk, he freezes at his work and finally lifts his head. Hopper's light eyes meeting his dark ones.

Mike waits as he listens to Hopper let out a long sigh as he drops his pen unceremoniously onto the paper in front of him, and he watches as Hopper leans back in his chair, stretching out his back, "What do you want, Wheeler?" he asks, his voice rough.

Mike shifts back and forth on his feet, he opens his mouth to say what he has been wanting to say for the last couple of weeks, but his voice catches in his throat as he speaks, "I...uh...I wanted to talk to you" he states lamely, he watches Hopper roll his eyes. "Obviously kid, or you wouldn't be here" he gestures to him.

Mike can feel his face warming, embarrassed as to how lame he sounds, but he attempts to hold his ground, by stopping his restless movements, and holds his feet to the ground. "Hopper, sir...I wanted to ask....I wanted to see if..." he continues to fumble over his question, his tongue unable to cooperate. Hopper groans at him, "Kid, just spit it out already!" he throws his hands out in impatience.

Mike startles but, it pushes his question out of him, "I want El to come to the snowball with me!" tumbles out of his mouth. His eyes widen, and he can feel his breath coming quickly, he's waiting to see what Hopper says.

But, the confused look on Hopper's face tells him he didn't get a word he said, and his thoughts are proven true when he watches Hopper shake his head and say, "What?"

Mike takes this moment to steady himself, only wanting to repeat his words once more, so he speaks slowly, "I...want El to come....to the snowball...with me". And now, he feels more confident in his words, his dark eyes watch Hopper nod slowly, taking in his words.

"What's this *snowball*, anyways, she's mentioned it once, but couldn't

really explain it" he gives the Mike a questioning look, as Mike begins to fiddle with the sleeves of his jacket, "It's a dance...sir" he throws in at the end.

"A dance?" Hopper fires back to the now sweating boy. Mike nods, "Yeah I uhm....I asked her to come...last year before she disappeared, and....now that she's back...I thought she could, uh, come?" he shrugs his shoulders, looking at the man before him with an unsteady gaze.

Hopper mulls the whole thing over in his head, "So, this dance is at the school then?" he asks. And Mike nods, "Yeah, a lot of people go, and it's more formal, I uh...didn't go last year...I was-" he breaks off, a deep look of sadness enveloping him.

He honestly *does* feel bad for the boy, but the words 'a lot of people go' stops his thought process. He leans forward slightly, his elbows rest gently on the desk before him. He takes in a deep breath, and then his eyes meet Mike.

He shakes his head, "I don't know, kid, it's still risky, especially being at a sch-" he starts but Mike jumps in, his fiery personality kicking into action, "Exactly! No one's going to notice, kids from other schools come all the time! She'll mesh right in!" his voice strains.

Hopper takes a moment to evaluate how quickly this kid can go from quiet, shy and reserved, to loud, fiery and argumentative in a second. However, he does seem to notice a pattern in this behavior, which happens to be any mention of El.

"Kid, I just...it's only been a month...I don't even know what's going to happen with this whole, *Murray* article either" he shrugs his shoulders to the boy. Mike huffs, his anger diminishing slightly, "Hopper, she deserves this...she deserves to be a normal teenage girl" he stresses, while his heart pounds frantically through his chest.

He watches with steady eyes as Hopper stands to his feet and lets out a heavy sigh. Their eyes meet again. Mike knows he's going to give him some kind of answer, and he's not sure if he wants to hear it or not, honestly not wanting to feel the heartbreak that might come if he says 'no'.

"I can't say 'yes' or 'no' in this moment, there's still a lot at play" Hopper's words hit Mike like a ton of bricks, he realizes in this moment, he's not even sure if he likes *this* answer either. So, he drops his eyes to the floor, not wanting his emotions to get the best of him as he moves from one foot to another.

He can feel the anger that he has towards Hopper, towards this whole situation bubble inside him, and instead of lashing out like he so desperately wants to, he suddenly turns towards the door, yanking it open, not wanting to look back.

However, he hears a frantic call behind him, "Hey, Mike, wait-". But instead of letting the older man finish, Mike turns back to the man, hurt written on his face, "It's the fourteenth, next month" he finishes as he moves out the door, shutting it behind him.

Mike silently fumes as he moves through the old police station and heads towards his bike. He flips one leg over the bike, as he maneuvers the piece of metal with ease. The air is cool and whips up his long hair into the wind.

It pricks at his skin, and he can feel his eyes start to water. He decides the tears are from the cold, and not from his anger that causes a tightness to form in his head.

He just wants one night, *one* normal night with the girl he so wishes had all the freedom in the world. Because he knew she deserved it, she had the right to experience the world of being an adolescent.

His knuckles turn white as he grips his handlebars in frustration. He continues to fume as he makes his way back home, his brain on autopilot, knowing the exact route home without having to think about it.

Mike pulls into his suburban driveway, coasting his bike down the driveway as he unceremoniously leaves his bike at the entrance to the basement. He doesn't want to talk to his parents or sisters, knowing that the second he sees his face that something is wrong. And at this very moment he doesn't want anything from anyone.

So, he tosses his backpack onto the nearby couch, and he settles into

the small fort that still stands in the corner of his basement.

Mike flops onto the blanketed floor and lets out a huff in frustration as he looks up to the patterned blanket before him.

"Why can't Hopper just let her out for an hour!" his brain screams to the emptiness. He crosses his arms over his chest, his breaths coming in quickly as he tries to reclaim his emotions. However, that proves to be much more challenging as his mind refuses to let go of this ruminating thought.

He can feel the sharp sting of tears pooling in his eyes, as a tightness fills his throat. Mike closes his dark eyes, letting out a long breath, as he allows his tears to stream down the sides of his face, accepting the anger that he's held for so long.

He lays there for a long time, allowing the tears to come, as he silently keeps to himself. Eyes closed, his body begins to relax as he falls into a light sleep.

Mike isn't sure how long he's slept away his anger, but the crackling of his nearby Supercom startles him awake, "Mike?" it crackles, a soft voice carrying through.

Mike perks at the noise, trying to ignore the noise, closing his eyes again, but then he hears, "Mike, is everything okay?" and he recognizes the voice immediately and sits up quickly, pulling the Supercom to him.

"Hey, El" he says back, his voice still heavy with sleep. He hears her sigh in relief before she answers back, "I thought something happened, it's five" she says. And this startles him slightly as he realizes he's been asleep for almost two hours.

"Oh, sorry El, I came home and fell asleep" he tries to push his normal voice through the Supercom, but his anger still lingers between the line, and El picks it up without hesitation, "Mike....what's wrong?" her voice is full of concern.

And Mike wants to come up with every excuse in the book, but he

still stands by his friends motto, *friends don't lie*, tumbles through his brain, and he sighs in defeat.

"I'm sorry El, it's just...I'm frustrated" he's amazed as to how easily he can say this to her. "At what?" she asks back.

He hesitates before pressing the button to answer her question, "I...I went to see Hopper today at the police station".

Silence rings through the other end, but El eventually puts one word through, "Why?" is what she asks.

"I uhm...I...I wanted to ask Hopper about the snowball" his voice lingers with heaviness. "Snowball" El's voice perks up and Mike can't help but laugh lightly to himself.

"Yeah, I mean...I promised I'd take you, and I still want to...if you'd go with me" his voice warbles in uncertainty.

But, all of his doubts diminish as El answer echoes through the device almost immediately after, "Yes! I still want to go!"

And Mike's pretty sure his heart is doing a little happy dance at the moment within his chest. "You do?" he can't help but ask.

He listens to her small giggle through the Supercom, and now his stomach is flipping, "Of course, I've been thinking about it too" she sighs.

"That's...that's great El, that makes me really happy" Mike can feel the smile growing on his face. "Me too" she whispers back. And Mike's pretty sure he hasn't felt this excited for a long time, thinking about bringing El to the dance with him was a dream come true.

However, reality crashed through him like a shattering window, and his face falls, "But-" his voice catches, unable to speak.

"But?" El echoes back, and Mike swallows a breath, "But, that's why I went to see Hopper, I asked him if you could come...and he said he couldn't answer me yet".

El stays silent on her end, and Mike worries that she has gotten upset,

so he sits up taller, "El?" he whispers through the device. "I'm here", her voice is sad on her end, which breaks Mike's heart silently.

And then the fury of the whole situation begins to stir within him once again, and a fierce determination rises through him, "I promise, we'll get you there somehow, even if I have to sneak you through your window", his voice is firm.

He softens when he hears El giggle, "Hopper wouldn't like that" she says back.

Mike shakes his head to the empty space, "Well, I promised I'd take you, and I don't like breaking promises...especially to you El" Mike's voice is soft and endearing.

Mike listens as El sighs heavily, "I know, I broke the promise of going last year" she says sadly.

"You didn't break that promise El, that was different circumstances" Mike rushes to say.

But El's voice back is still sad, and haughty, "Yeah, being stuck in this cabin". At this Mike's frustration bubbles again, but he tries to keep it cool for the sake of El. "Don't worry El, we'll get you there, no matter what", and in this moment, Mike makes a silent promise to himself that no matter what, El will go to the snowball.

She doesn't know when she has honestly felt *this* sad, and confused about everything that was going on in her life. There were times where it seemed as if everything was out to get between her and her freedom...and Mike, if she was being honest.

The tears that fell onto her pillow were warm and thick, she could taste their saltiness as they fell past her lips and into her mouth. She tried her hardest to muffle her sobs into her pillowcase, she didn't want Hopper knowing how upset she was.

Her heart felt heavy after the conversation she had just had with Hopper. It was tricky for her to hold in her emotions without throwing a tantrum and letting her powers run wild. But, the fact of

what she and Hopper had discussed had truly broken her, and she felt as if the whole world was against her.

In her heart, all she wanted was to go to the snowball with a specific boy and enjoy the night as if she was always meant to be there. More tears fall heavy onto her pillow as she squeezes it tightly to her chest.

Her thoughts halt though, when she hears a knock on the door, "El?" Hopper's voice is soft. She ignores it, pulling the pillow closer, hoping he leaves.

After a few moments she thinks he does, but then she hears a knock, more firmer this time, "El, please can we talk, I'm not going to yell at ya, or anything, I...just want to be there for you".

She can hear the sincerity behind his words, and she sits in contemplation. Before she finally sighs into her pillow, flicks her head, and unlocks the door.

She doesn't turn towards him, but she can hear his steady steps approach her. El feels a soft hand on her shoulder, but she doesn't move, waiting for him to speak.

"El....I know this...sucks" he starts, as El continues to lay immobile. "But, there will be a day where....we won't have to worry about any of this, where you will be safe" he says quietly.

El evaluates his words, and in her truest of wishes...she hopes his words come true. She enjoys the small rubbing motion he does on her back, and in a way it relaxes her, she can sense that he's really trying.

So, she turns towards him, her eyes tired from crying, "Just...want to be normal", she answers honestly.

Her eyes watch him as she sees his face fall slightly, but then he moves his hand and brushes a sweaty piece of hair away from her face, giving her a gentle smile, "What do you mean?" he asks gently.

She lets out a soft breath, "Normal, go to school, no hiding, being with friends, being with...Mike" she whispers as she closes her eyes, another tear escaping down her cheek.

Hopper continues to stroke her hair, "And you will be, kid, that's *my* promise to you" he stresses. Her dark eyes meet his light, searching for truth, "I-I know it's hard to understand, but sometimes things...take time".

"If it were all up to me kid, I would give you the world, everything you deserve, but...I don't have that control. And I know it's not fair to ask you to be patient, but...you've done so well, and I *really* mean soon this time" he desperately tries to reach out to her, and she feels it.

She finally lets out a long breath, closing her eyes as she does so. "Okay...I'll try to be more patient" she whispers, opening her eyes and meeting Hopper's.

She watches him smile, and she feels her heart soften, "That's my girl" he says as he strokes her hair again. El continues to lay there, the simple motion of Hopper rubbing her back soothes her. They sit there silently, just being with each other, and eventually El feels her eyes begin to grow heavy, and soon...she drifts off to sleep.

The days drag on in the old cabin. And El silently hopes each day that Hopper arrives home, that he might have some news to share with her. She gives him a look of hope each night at dinner once she has finished her nightly call with Mike, but each time he remains silent.

So, she continues to mope about the cabin. Her calls with Mike growing sadder each day, knowing that the snowball creeps closer, which means that she can feel the anxiousness that Mike attempts to hide in each conversation, which makes her more depressed each time.

She honestly begins to think that *nothing* will change, and her body grows heavy with acceptance that she will probably live out her life, stuck in the cabin...alone.

Her thoughts are drifting as she lays on the couch watching the t.v. Her eyes flick to the clock, and she rolls her eyes, *he's late again*, runs through her mind, as she flicks her eyes back to the t.v.

However, she's brought out of her moment when she hears heavy footfalls approach the steps. She hears the secret knock, and she with a flick of her head, the door is unlocked, and Hopper trumps in.

She's actually quite ticked at him this time, and chooses to let her frustration about everything out on him, so as he's hanging up his coat and hat she says, "You're late....again" with a heavy sigh.

Hopper moves towards her and sits down on the available couch space, he looks at the girl, trying to contain his excitement, "I know El, I'm sorry, but I've got a good reason for it", he gives her a steady look.

At this El, sits up her attention on him, she gives him a look waiting for him to continue. She watches as he pulls a newspaper and an envelope from under his arm and gently places them in front of her. She moves to look at the newspaper, "What's this?" she asks, as she works through the words in her head.

"This kid", he points to the newspaper, "Is telling us that the lab, the place that hurt you and kept you locked away...is gone, it's getting shut down, they'll all be gone by next week" he explains to her.

El feels herself freeze at his words, her eyes are immediately on his, trying to make sure that he's not playing some kind of joke on her.

She watches as he opens the envelope next, as he lays it down in front of her, she sounds out the words the best she can, "Birth..certi..certifi..certificate?" she gives him a questioning, watching his smile grow, "Yeah, that's it, this...this means that there's proof of your existence, that you can do whatever you want now".

El looks back down at the paper, "Jane...Eleanor...Hopper?" she throws a look at him, and Hopper nods.

"That's you kid, Eleanor because you go by 'El', but Jane...is the name your mother gave you" he explains. She looks at the certificate again, "Momma, Theresa Ives, Papa...you", she breathes looking up at the man with wide eyes, she honestly can't believe what she's looking at.

He nods to her, "Yeah, it means that I'm your father, so I can take

care of you...if you want and....you'll be my daughter" he shrugs his shoulder.

"Papa?" she asks, but. Hopper shakes his head, "How about something different, that was the man who kidnapped you...the man who did all of that horrible stuff to you", he explains.

She nods her head before saying, "Dad?" and at this Hopper laughs, "You can call me whatever you want kid...just...is this okay...that I'll be your...dad?" he asks gently, meeting the girls eyes.

El takes in his words, absorbing everything that has just been laid down in front of her. Her eyes move across the papers her hands gently reaching out and touching them, making sure they are real. She feels her heart pounding in her chest in excitement, she had never had a *real* family before. And this small bit of paper just made it a reality.

Finally, she raises her head, and her eyes meet Hopper's, instead of answering, she gives a small nod, as a smile creeps onto her face, a tear escaping her eyes. "Dad" she whispers, and then she moves, slowly, and envelopes him in a warm hug. He returns the hug, wrapping his arms around her tiny frame, as a few stray tears stray from his eyes too.

El stays there in the embrace, enjoying this new feeling of belonging.

The next couple of days pass by with incident. However, even though Hopper has officially given her that small bit of paper that has pretty much freed her, a single question still stirs within her mind.

She wants to ask it more than anything, but her fear is that the answer will still be 'no', so she hesitates.

But, she knows the snowball is only a couple days away, and she needs to ask sooner rather than later. So, a few days before the snowball, El nervously approaches Hopper, who is sitting at their dinner table reading the paper.

When she approaches him, he quips an eyebrow at her, when she

finally lets out the question that has been straining on her for too long. "Can I...can I go to the snowball...with Mike?" her amber eyes search meet his blue ones.

And she only has to wait a moment before Hopper reaches out and rubs her hair affectionately, "Yeah kid, you can go".

And with the answer *finally* given, El feels all the anxiety and excitement leave her body as she screeches out a loud scream as she jumps up and down in joy. She then tackles Hopper and gives him a quick hug. Her mind is going a thousand miles a minute, but the first thing she wants to do is call Mike, so once she lets go of Hopper, she makes a beeline for her room.

However, Hopper's voice catches her, "Woah, woah, wait!" and El freezes at her door, giving him a curious look.

"Where are you going?" he asks the girl. El shrugs, "To tell Mike" she answers obviously, does Hopper truly think she's going to let Mike wait another second to let him know that she will be going to the snowball? Hopper moves towards the girl as she watches his movements, "Why don't we...surprise him?" he throws the question at the girl.

"Surprise?" she says, the new word foreign to her. Hopper nods his head, "Yeah, it means to do something unexpectedly, where, Mike will think you won't be coming to the snowball, but then you show up, it'll blow his mind".

El analyzes his words, "But, isn't that mean, and friends don't lie" she says to him firmly, she really doesn't like the idea of keeping this from Mike. Hopper sighs as he bends down to her level, "Look, I just, want to make sure you are all set and ready to go, and it'll be safer for you to just be there, without him looking around like he's expecting someone. This is still new, and we need to be careful, okay?" he gives the girl a look.

She moves her head to the left and right, thinking his words over, she *really* wants to tell Mike, but this 'surprise' thing sounds kind of fun for her too, so she finally sighs and nods, "Okay, won't tell Mike" she huffs.

Hopper nods, "Thanks kid, and I'll try to get something figured out so that we can get you a dress, shoes and everything else you need". El perks at these words, "Make-up?" the word rolls off her tongue as she gives a hopeful look to the man. He chuckles, "Alright, I'll try to get that too" he sighs, as El smiles brightly again and hops into her room.

But, she finds that it is *extremely* difficult to keep this surprise from Mike, because she can tell that he wants to ask about the snowball, but, just as she had been nervous about asking Hopper about going, he's afraid of the answer.

She tries to stay off of the topic when they talk, and she can sense the sadness in Mike's voice, which makes her hurt as well, but, she knows that in two short days, they will be together at the snowball.

Finally, the day of the snowball arrives, and he can't feel more anxious. He had tried to bring it up in conversation the last couple of days to El during their daily conversations, but everytime he attempted to talk, she would immediately try to change the subject. Which, disappointed him.

But, he tried to understand where she was coming from too. And, if he was being honest with himself, he was trying to read between the lines as well. He was almost positive that El couldn't go to the snowball, and talking about it only made her feel worse.

So, after their last conversation that happened before he went to bed, he dropped the subject completely, and tried his best to not seem disappointed.

And as the sun rose the next morning, he really didn't want to have to hoist himself out of bed, feeling the dread of the day looming over him.

Mike laid in his bed, staring blankly at his ceiling, he let out a long breath. He began to contemplate in his mind if he was going to go to the snowball at all. He believed that if El couldn't go, then why should he bother?

This thought transpired through his brain while he laid there. It

wasn't until his mom called for him downstairs did he get pulled out of his depressed thoughts. He eventually psyched himself up enough to get up out of his bed, and head downstairs.

He sat down at his usual spot at the table, as his mom sat a plate of blueberry pancakes in front of him. "Here you go, honey", she said chipperly, as she moved to sit next to his little sister Holly. While Nancy sat across from him giving him a worried look.

"What's wrong?" Nancy quipped at him before he could even reach for the syrup bottle. He fixes her with a tight stare, "Nothing", he says softly, not wanting to get into it.

Nancy rolls her eyes, "Mike, there's obviously something bothering you" she states matter of factly as she pokes at her own stack of pancakes. Mike squeezes the syrup bottle more firmly than he means too, trying to keep his anger in check.

"Mike, is there something wrong?" his mom chips in too. At this, Mike places the syrup bottle firmly onto the table, looking at both of them, "Look...nothing's wrong, just...tired" he lies.

Nancy shakes her head, "You're not a very good liar, little brother". This, sets Mike off, as he slams his hand onto the table, his anger getting the better of him. "Michael!" his mom shouts to him and he shoots her a look.

His older sister can't help but give him a smug look, "Is it about the snowball?" her eyebrows quirk up. "Ugh, yes! If that makes you feel better!" he growls from across the table.

"Why, what's wrong?" his mom asked concerned. Mike huffs and leans back into his chair, picking at his pancakes, "Nothing's wrong", he seethes.

"Obviously something is" Nancy singsongs back. Mike gives her a firm look, "I just...I just don't want to go" he says quietly, and at this Nancy perks up, giving him a strained look.

"What, why?" both Nancy and his mom say at the same time. Mike rolls his eyes at the two of them, "Just...don't want to" he shrugs his

shoulders.

Nancy shakes her head, "No, Mike you've got to, it's your last middle school dance". But, he shakes his head, "Don't really care".

But Nancy doesn't take this as a final answer, "Mike, come on, it'll be fun-" she tries, but Mike lets his fork drop to his plate as he stands, giving his sister a leveled look, "I don't care if it'll be fun, I just don't want to go!" he shouts as he stomps away from the table and makes his way back up the stairs, shutting his bedroom door behind him. Leaving both his sister and mother with worried looks.

He shuts his bedroom door with enough muster to make it slam, as he moves to his bed and begins to furiously punch at his pillow. All of the anger and frustration that had built up in him finally making its way out.

As he punches the pillow he mutters under his breath, "Stupid lab. Stupid Hopper and his dumb rules. Stupid...everything!" he growls as he throws the pillow across his room, his chest heaving as he clenches his teeth together.

And then, after the anger begins to fade, he feels the sadness within him take over. His breathes turn into sobs, and his eyes begin to leak the tears of all the sorrow he had been holding in him. He curls into himself allowing the tears to flow, keeping his sobs as quiet as possible.

After awhile, he is laying on his bed, sniffing. Thinking about nothing, but everything, when he hears a knock on his door, "Mike, can I come in?" Nancy's voice trickles through.

He turns his head into his blanket further, not answering. Moments later another knock, "Mike, come on please, it's important", she tries again.

Mike really doesn't want to talk, but then he hears his door knob jostling, and moments later, his sister enters his room. He whips his head up and gives his sister a leveled look, "I don't want to talk" he growls, turning away from her.

He listens to her sigh behind him. "Mike, I know how hard it's been...for you and Eleven" she speaks softly.

He lets out a scoff, "Yeah, your boyfriend is only a couple miles away, you go to school together, you know *exactly* how I feel" his sarcasm drips heavily through his words.

Mike feels his bed sink lightly as Nancy sits back to back with him. "No...I don't know what it feels like...you're right".

He stays still, listening to her words. "You and El deserve to be together, and I know everything with the lab and her not going out, makes things difficult", she starts.

"But...that doesn't mean you stop going out, you stop having fun, do you really think El would want you to sit at home, miserable, or go out and *try* to have fun?" her words sink into him.

Mike huffs, "So, I'm just supposed to go to the snowball, see people with their girlfriends and act 'happy', no thanks".

Nancy lets out another breath, "No, but your friends are going alone too, don't you want to be with them?" she asks curiously.

Mike contemplates this for a bit, but then shakes his head, "Lucas has Max".

"So what? There's still Dustin and Will, they'll miss you there" she argues back.

He lets out his own breath, "I just...I promised El I'd take her, and I can't" his voice is filled with sadness.

"You can't?" Nancy asks, Mike shakes his head, "No, everytime I tried to bring it up to her, she just changes the subject, I can read between the lines, it means Hopper said 'no' and she doesn't want to get sad about it".

Nancy lets out a laugh, "Okay, but you don't know that she *won't* be there. How do you know if Hopper doesn't say 'yes' today?" she tries to reassure her brother.

Mike perks at her words, but the heaviness of going to the dance, and her not being there...it breaks his heart.

"But...if she's not there...I just..." he stops short. Nancy turns so that she is sitting beside him, "And what if she *does* go and you're not there? How awful would you feel then?" she argues.

Mike plays the scene out in his head, seeing El dressed up and at the dance, looking eagerly around the dance floor for him, but...never does. And then the sadness written on her face, and...his mind even plays against him, another boy asking her to dance. His stomach flares in anger.

He then stands quickly, "Fine, I'll go", his mind made up, as Nancy stands beside him, giving him a wide grin, "Glad to hear that Mike, you'll have a great time no matter what".

Mike rolls his eyes, "Whatever Nance, can you go, I just...want to be alone for a bit" he admits. And Nancy nods slowly, "Okay, but if you need anything let me know, Jonathan and I are leaving a little early, so, I'll see you there?" she asks one more time.

Mike huffs in annoyance, "Yes" he quips before shooing her out the door. What he doesn't see though is the knowing grin and quick light steps Nancy has as she leaps joyously to her room, silently knowing something Mike does not.

El can feel the stirring in her stomach, or 'butterflies' as Hopper had once described to her as her excitement for the night continues to grow with each passing minute.

She keeps herself preoccupied by pacing between her room, the kitchen and the living room. She can see that it is driving Hopper slightly crazy, but she can't help it.

After *weeks* she's finally going to see Mike tonight, and her heart flutters in her chest. She's taken up to asking Hopper how much longer it is until she can get ready every half hour. He finally asks her if she wants to eat something, but she declines, knowing it's too knotted to even try.

Hopper finally coaxes her to sit and watch the t.v for a while to keep her mind preoccupied. She attempts to watch the shows that flicker before her eyes, but her mind is still reeling over what's to come for the night. So, instead of focusing on the show, she allows her mind to wander and allow it to come up with as many amazing scenarios of how she believes tonight will go, which pulls a soft smile onto her face.

After what seems like an eternity, Hopper finally turns to look at the old clock on the wall and pats her shoulder. "Okay kid, you can get into the shower now, it's about time you can get ready", and before he even finishes his sentence, El jumps from the couch, runs to her room to grab her necessary items, and rushes to the bathroom.

El takes her time getting herself cleaned up, she wants tonight to be absolutely perfect, so she methodically gets herself clean, allowing the water and soap to clean her up.

Once she is done and dresses in her under clothes, she stands in front of the mirror, towel still wrapped around her as she combs out her hair. Just as she finishes up, there's a knock at the door, "Hey El, it's Nancy, can I come in, I want to blow dry and style your hair". And without a hesitating thought, El opens the door just enough for an excited Nancy to slip through the door, her arms full of supplies.

El moves out of her way in the small bathroom. She watches with curious eyes as Nancy places something covered in plastic hanging from the hook attached to the door, where she usually hangs her towel.

Nancy catches her curious look, and she smiles to her, "That's your dress", she says with a smirk, and El's eyes light up, moving towards it, however, Nancy stops her, "Uh, uh, uh, not until you're hair's done, *then* you'll get to see your dress", the older girls eyes are gleaming.

El huffs, but whispers a quick, "Okay", as she moves to stand in front of the mirror, as Nancy continues to place things here and there throughout the bathroom, El watching her every movement.

Until, she finally stops, standing next to El, holding a peculiar object. She points to it, "What is that?" she asks.

Nancy smiles, but rolls her eyes at the same time, "Leave it to Hopper to not teach his adopted daughter about a hair dryer", she says.

Nancy plugs in the hairdryer, holding it in her left hand, and a comb in her right, "You ready, El?" she asks, as El continues to look at the device in her hand with a bit of apprehension.

The older girl giggles lightly, "Don't worry El, it just blows out hot air that helps get your hair dry sooner" she explains, and El nods in understanding, taking in a deep breath as Nancy moves behind her, flicking on the hairdryer.

She can't help but startle when it turns on, the sound being louder than she expected, but she catches Nancy's warm smile and kind eyes in the mirror, and she knows she can trust her. She *is* Mike's sister after all.

El gives Nancy a tight nod, and the older girl begins to maneuver around her as the warm air hits her face and cold hair. She can feel Nancy pulling her hair this way and that, skillfully making her hair look more manageable.

She doesn't like it when a tight knot is pulled from her head, but it doesn't happen often, and she chooses to let it go. After what seems like forever, Nancy flicks the hair dryer off, sets it and the comb down on the counter, and then runs her long fingers through El's curling hair.

"Let's see what we can do with this" Nancy mutters to herself, as El sits patiently, allowing Nancy to do her thing.

She watches through the mirror as Nancy pours different, nice smelling products into her hand, which she then runs through her hair. El notices she is not doing it the same way her sister did last month, just pulling her hair straight back. Instead, Nancy takes her time, her hair curling differently than when she just allows it to dry out.

Her eyes widen as she sees her hair curl, but it's not as 'poofy' as it usually is. "Alright, almost done" Nancy states from behind El, as she pulls at her curls, and then she can feel something clip into her hair.

When Nancy steps away, the older girl's eyes meet El's in the mirror. Nancy moves to El's face, pulls at a curl, and tucks it just right on her forehead. She steps back clapping her hands, "Well, what do you think?"

And El can barely answer her because she is so absorbed in how she looks, and stares at herself in awe. Nancy has placed a small pin into her hair, and how it curls expertly instead of all over, it makes her feel even more pretty.

So, all El can do is give the older girl a beaming smile, "It's perfect" is all she can get out and Nancy squeals in approval, "Okay, good! Your hair is so curly, but it's fun to play with!" she says as she moves towards another small bag she brought in with her.

Nancy moves to stand in front of El, a brush in her hand, El's mind immediately races to last year, where Mike had done the same thing to her before they headed to the school, she smiles at the thought.

"Okay El, this is called make-up, I'm going to put just a little bit on you, okay?" Nancy asks in reassurance to the girl, but El nods eagerly.

And, after Nancy has pulled out just about every item in her bag, she steps away from the mirror and points to it, "El, how's that?" the older girl asks. And the second El's eyes meet her own in the mirror, her eyes widen.

Nancy has skillfully painted her face in a way that was *very* different from the dark eyeliner her sister had smeared over her eyes. Instead, a light purple was layered over her eyelids, and Nancy had put some black lines around her eyes in a delicate manner.

Her cheeks were rosier than normal, and looking at herself in the mirror, she felt like a princess like in the movies she loved to watch. Her hand reaches out to her reflection, not believing it's her.

"Do you like it?" Nancy asks hesitantly behind her, and instead of answering, El turns quickly and embraces the girl. "Thank you", El breathes to her, and Nancy holds onto her tighter. "You're welcome El, you deserve to look extra special tonight...and I'm pretty sure there's a certain, *someone*, who will be blown away" her voice is light

and teasing.

El pulls away slowly, her eyes meeting the older girls who's giving her a teasing look, and at the realization of her words, El feels her face flush even more. Nancy giggles at her reaction as she moves to the plastic bag, untying it from its binds, as she pulls the dress free.

"Here, I'll turn around so you can get dressed" Nancy directs her to the other side of the bathroom, as Nancy turns around.

El drops her towel, and steps into the dress gingerly, remembering the first time she had put on Nancy's other pink dress.

She pulls the sleeves over her arms, but she stops, unable to get the zipper, "Ummm", she hums to herself and Nancy peaks over her shoulder, "Need help with the zipper?" she asks. "Yes", El whispers, and the older girl turns with a smile, going behind El, and zipping up the dress effortlessly.

Nancy must sense her nervousness, because she hears the older girl giggle, "El, it's okay to be nervous, but, I promise you, tonight will be a night you won't forget".

Their eyes meet, and El can see the honesty written behind them, so she smiles and nods, "Come on, you're all set now, let's go show Hopper", Nancy says excitedly, and El follows quickly behind her.

He honestly doesn't know why he thought it would be a good idea to come. He feels claustrophobic in the layers of unnecessary clothing his mom insisted that he wear. The front of his mind was telling this was a stupid idea, and that El wouldn't be there. But, somewhere in the back of his hopeful mind, he held the torch that El *would* be here, and that he would rather be dead then watch her dance with some other guy.

That fact, was pretty much the only reason he dragged himself there. But, he had to admit, being close to his friends, and seeing Dustin's ridiculous hairdo, almost made it worth it, *almost*.

He had joined up with the guys and Max effortlessly enough, and

they stood about talking easily with one another as the songs dragged on.

He couldn't help but scan the room over and over again, his eyes searching for one particular person. But, each time he did, his hope of her being there died even more so in his chest. This feeling became even more present when the first slow song of the evening came on.

Within moments, Lucas was dancing with Max, Will had been invited onto the floor as well, and even Dustin was putting himself out there, which, left Mike utterly alone.

He chose to sit and watch his friends move awkwardly about with their dance partner, as he began to feel the loneliness seep in. He even caught his sister pulling Dustin on the dance floor to sway with one another, *this* he decided, was his lowest point.

He heaved a heavy sigh as he heard the current song fade away, and another slow song took its place. He would have growled it disdain at his luck, but he chose to sit it out.

Deep in thought, thinking about El, and wishing she were here, the sound of the gymnasium door opening caught his attention, and he's pretty sure he died as his eyes fell on the girl who had just walked through the door.

He almost didn't recognize her. He had see her with a shaved head, slicked back hair, and in an adorable curly mess. But, in this moment, it was curled perfectly, she had a light layer of makeup on, and the dress she was wearing took his breath away. He almost couldn't believe it.

And as if he could feel his eyes boring into her, she searched the room, when their eyes finally met, and he's pretty sure all of the air in his lungs left in that instant.

He feels a smile pull onto his face, and watches her do the same. He forces himself to move from his spot and move towards her.

In that moment, he's pretty sure he's never been more nervous or excited all at once. What he really wants to do is run to her, pick her

up, swing her around and place a gentle kiss on her lips. But, he refrains, knowing they need to keep as much attention away from them as possible.

So, he painstakingly moves one foot after another as he moves across the dance floor, as he watches El mimic his movements. And, after what seems like a lifetime, they meet in the middle, smiles tugging at their mouths.

He wants to say everything and anything to her, he stutters instead, "Uh...you look beautiful" stumbles through his mouth, and he's happy he even got that out. He moves closer to her, as he watches her duck her head in bashfulness and her cheeks brighten.

He believes it's the most adorable thing in the world, and all he wants to do is hold her close, so he asks her the next question, "Do you want to dance?", he looks out at the other kids who are moving in sync with one another, and then back to El, who too is looking at the dance floor, "I...don't know how", her amber eyes meet his dark ones in worry.

Mike gives her a warm smile, "I don't know either, want to figure it out?" he tries to convey as much calmness to her as possible. Their eyes meet again, and she gives him a small smile and nod to his question.

Giddy with everything that's running through his mind, he reaches out (his hopefully not sweaty hand), as El mimics him and they clasp hands together. Mike gingerly leads her out to the dance floor, wanting them to blend in with everyone else.

He can feel his nerves begin to swell within him, but knowing El is right here, right next to him, he pushes them to the side. He stops them once they have enmeshed themselves into the group and he stops turning towards the beautiful girl in front of him.

Mike moves to take El's hands, "Here, like this" he says gently as he places each of her hands on his shoulders, as she looks at him with wonder, and he shakily places his hands on her hips, as they each pull the other closer, "Yeah, like that" he says, and both of them beam at one another.

He can just hear the music playing throughout the gym, because all of his attention right now is on the most amazing girl he's ever met in his life, and he can't believe his luck at being this close to her.

As the song plays on, they drift closer together, he can feel her breath on him, as they study each other's eyes. "I can't believe you're here" he can't help but burst out. And El giggles to him, "Me either" she beams at him.

"You're going to have to tell me how you convinced Hopper" he jokes as she nods her head, "I will, but I like this...being here with you" her eyes soften, and he feels his heart beat rapidly against his chest.

She ducks in embarrassment, but to him, it's the most adorable thing he could see her do. And when she looks back up at him, he feels the pull between them, she's so close, and he wants to be even closer. He watches her eyes flick to his lips, and it's in that moment he decides he can't wait.

He ducks his head gently, and to his surprise, El moves up to him, and they meet in the middle. Their lips pressing together in a sweet, simple but meaningful kiss, as they sway about together.

They pull away a moment later, and he can see El's look of happiness, which makes his heart soar. El moves her head forward, and their foreheads meet, he honestly couldn't be happier in this moment.

El can't believe where she is as she walks through the auditorium. The last time she had been in a room with so many people, was in this exact spot, over a year ago, when she sat beside Mike, listening to someone talk about Will's disappearance and apparent death.

Back then, she was nervous to be in a place with so many people, and she should be nervous now. But, the moment her eyes met Mike's, every feeling of nervousness leaves her, because she knows she's safe.

And when they meet in the middle, it's as if it's just the two of them together. Her heart just about explodes when Mike calls her beautiful, and she melts even more when he asks her to dance.

She doesn't know how she got so lucky. To think back to the night he and the boys found her, for her and Mike to form an unbreakable bond, to be with him in this moment, she felt like the luckiest girl in the world.

As they swayed back and forth to the beat of the song that played throughout the gym, she felt herself pulling herself closer to the boy, as he tightened his grip on her waist.

The way he looked at her, it made her feel so special, and she couldn't help but duck away to his intense gaze. However, she didn't want to miss a moment with this boy, and when she looked up and their eyes met, she could feel the pull towards one another.

She watched as Mike moved his head closer to hers, and she couldn't resist the pull either. She felt their lips connect, and everything else melted away, it was just them in their own moment. It was soft, simple and quick, but the meaning behind the kiss meant everything to El.

So, when she pulled away, she couldn't help but feel breathless and bashful as she made eye contact with the boy once again. And seeing his smiling face, she leaned in once again, their foreheads touching, making the moment complete.

Mike wished this song could have lasted forever, but once the last notes disappeared into the air, a fast beat song replaced it, which startled El slightly.

His hands still firmly around her waist, he pulled her close, "Are you okay?" he asks slightly worried. Her amber eyes meet his, she nods, "Yes, just...loud" she determines.

Mike moves his hand to catch hers, which makes her smile, "Come on, let's go see the guys, and Max, they'll be so excited that you're here".

El nods eagerly as Mike pulls her along, as she stays as close to his side as possible. They weave through the crowd, eyes barely watching them, seeing them as just another couple moving towards

the tables.

He sees that his friends have found a table, he turns and gives El a soft smile, which she returns, as they move towards their friends. Mike stands in front of the table, holding El's hand tightly, none of them look to them, too engrossed in what they're discussing.

Mike rolls his eyes and clears his throat loudly, at this all eyes flip to him, and then the girl standing beside him.

"El!" Dustin yells and moves to the girl, as Lucas and Will stand excitedly as well. Hugs are given all around, and when Will pulls away, Dustin jumps in with a million questions, "How are you here, when did you get here, what-", but Mike stops him, "Dustin, easy, she just got here, we dance to the last song, and I figured you guys would want to see her" he explains.

The boys nod, "Well, it's good to see you here El, how are you liking it?" Lucas asks her. She looks around the decorated room, and then her eyes fall onto his, they both smile, "It's perfect" is all she says as she looks back to the boys.

They chuckle lightly, "That's good to here, we'll have to get you out to dance to some of these quicker songs" Dustin points to the kids dancing to the song behind him.

Mike watches as El shrugs her shoulders lightly, he can sense that she wants to take this slow, absorbing everything one at a time.

Mike squeezes her hand, "Remember guys, this is all new to her, we'll take it slow", and El squeezes his hand in return at his words.

"Fine! But, we will get her out there one way or another" Dustin points his finger to the girl, who giggles lightly.

And, to Mike's surprise, El warms up to the idea of dancing, however, Mike isn't to leave her side. To his embarrassment, he has to show the girl he very much cares about, that he is a sucky dancer. And to his disbelief, she's a natural dancer, quickly moving past him in dance moves.

But, all the laughing between them, and the joy on her face makes it

all worth it to Mike as they all dance together to a string of fast songs.

However, a slow song finally comes on, and El all but throws herself into his arms. It startles him at first, but he melts into her, as he holds her close. They're hugging each other tightly, swaying to the soft song.

After a minute, El pulls away and rests her hands on his shoulder, her amber eyes are soft as he gets lost in them.

"Your eyes are so pretty" he whispers into her ear. El giggles, "I like your eyes too" she says with a small smile.

They continue to sway to the gentle music, and Mike can't believe his luck in being here with El in this moment, finally. And it hits Mike all at once, that this is the moment he's been waiting for, and as he thinks a smile grows on his face, which El notices.

"Why are you smiling like that?" she asks in a sweet manner. Mike shakes his head as he pulls away from her slightly, a small frown falls onto El's face, but Mike squeezes her hand, "Don't worry, come with me", he says as he tugs her along.

Mike pulls the girl through the tight crowd of other teenagers and he reaches the door leading out to the hallway. El giggles following him, "Mike, where are we going?" her voice is full of excitement.

He chuckles as he looks around the room, making sure no one is paying them attention, as he pushes the door open and slinks out through it, El following behind him.

"Come on!" he says with a light, amused tone, as he grips El's hand and they run through the hallway, both laughing along the way.

Mike knows exactly where he is bringing this amazing girl, and his smile grows even more so on his face. He turns his head back slightly catching the elated look on El's face as they run through the halls, knowing he made the right decision.

The door he is looking for finally comes into view, and he stops suddenly, El crashing into him slightly with a small squeak. He

catches her, and he holds onto her, looking at her as they laugh and try to catch their breaths.

"Mike, what's going on?" El giggles looking up to him with happiness. Mike shrugs his shoulder as he pushes open the door and pulls El in behind him.

He stops and looks around the room, spotting the exact same spot they were in over a year ago. Their hands are interlaced together as he gently guides her to the spot. He gazes at El and watches as she takes in the room around her, a look of 'ah-ha' on her face.

The area is different, with all the tables being pushed up against the walls during the night, but he knows the spot by heart. Refusing to even go near the table for the last year, his heart breaking every time his eyes lingered a little too long there.

He lets El look around a little longer, until she stops moving her head, her eyes finding his, "The cafeteria" she whispers. "Yeah, do you...remember?" he asks quietly, searching her face for any recognition.

She turns her head ever so slightly to look at him, and she gives him a shy smile, "This is where you asked me to go to the snowball with you", her eyes sparkle up at him.

He squeezes both of her hands within his own, he sighs inwardly in relief, "Yeah, exactly, that's why I wanted to bring you here".

El looks up at him with questioning eyes. He takes in a deep breath, feeling the nerves settle in. "El?" he breathes out, the girl in question takes a step towards him, which makes him even more self-aware, "Yes?" her voice is gentle and sweet, only making what he wants to say even more difficult.

"Uh..um...do you remember...how..in that moment, like when we were talking about you coming to my house, maybe taking my room and-" he rambles, and El holds up a hand to stop him, surprising him, she giggles, "Yes, I remember all that" her smile warms up the room, and he can feel some tension leave his body.

A warm smile grows on his face, knowing he shouldn't have to be nervous in front of this girl. So, he swallows his fear and speaks as clearly as his mouth allows him to, "Okay, and you remember then...how I told you, you go to the snowball with someone you, like?"

And at this El nods lightly, waiting for him to continue. He squeezes her hands again, and pulls her a little closer to him, they are now only a breath away from one another, "Well...I uh...I like you El" his dark eyes search hers.

She smiles at him again, her white teeth glistening in the moonlight cascading into the room, "I like you too, Mike" she says, but Mike shakes his head, "This is a different kind of *like*" he sputters out, and El tilts her head.

"I mean, when you like something or someone, it could mean you like certain qualities and aspects of those things" he trails off, looking at the girl before him, making sure she's following along.

"But...you can also, *really* like something, or someone too, like....like you like them more than anyone else, and all you want to do is be around *them* and spend most of your time with them...alone" he shrugs his shoulders to the girl.

Her eyes flicker across his face, "Do you understand what I mean?" he says slightly more desperate than he means too. But, El nods her head, "Like, Lucy and Ricky, they're married" she quips to him in a happy tone. He nods enthusiastically, "Yeah, exactly! They chose to be with *just* each other for the rest of their lives, like they have friends and family, but, they chose to be partners in life together" Mike feels his palms sweating, and he hopes El doesn't notice.

"But, people don't just become husband and wife, they usually start out...dating" he pushes out. And El's face lights up at this, "Boyfriend and girlfriend" she chirps, and it's Mike's turn to give her a questioning look, which she catches, "Watch a lot of soap operas" she admits with a shrug of her shoulders.

Mike nods in understanding. "Hopper explained it to me too", she finishes, her eyes meeting his once again. He can feel himself relaxing

slightly knowing that she knows about this stuff.

So, instead of working himself up even more, he bravely pushes on, "Then...you understand...what I was trying to ask you...last year? Not...not that we would immediately be together...but...you know" he tries spitting out, failing miserably at what he wanted to be a perfect moment.

However, his worries are squashed once again when El giggles up to him again, "Mike, I understand, and that's why...you kissed me" her gaze is warm and intense, and he can feel his heart pounding against his ribcage.

He swallows, "Yes, I was trying to tell you that....I liked you...and that I liked you more than *just* a friend, that you weren't like Dustin or Lucas", his voice is soft and sincere.

"And...after a whole year apart, I knew that if, *when*...I saw you again, I couldn't let you not know how I felt", and at this he moves his left hand from hers, and places it on El's hip, while she moves her free hand to rest on his shoulder.

He's pretty sure he's shaking in anticipation, but he has to get out what he wants to say, "El" he looks her straight in the eye, "I like you, *a lot*, more than just a friend, and I want us...I want us to grow together, to *be* with each other" his voice quivers slightly, and as he looks into the girl's face he's been pining for, for over a year, he can see her eye's watering slightly.

"El...I...I want you to be my girlfriend....I want to go out with you, to share special moments like this together" and Mike begins to feel himself choke up at his words.

"Mike" El whispers up to him, he can feel her tighten her grip on his shoulder. But, he doesn't let her speak, "I know you may not understand everything about being a couple and stuff, but, I'm here to explain it all to you, or Nancy or Joyce, if you feel more comfortable talking to a girl. It's just I mean-", but his talking is put to a halt when El's hand covers his mouth, his eyes widen in surprise.

El shakes her head at him, smiling brightly up to him, "Mike, I know

what a boyfriend and girlfriend are...what they do" she looks away slightly, blushing, but then she looks back to him. "And I...I like you too, *a lot*, and...I want to share special moments with you too, I'd like to be your girlfriend" she finishes as a small tear cascades down her face.

Mike's pretty sure he's frozen in place as he catches her words, *she actually wants to be his girlfriend!* His brain screams at him in delight, and he can barely contain his excitement. His hand tightens around her waist.

"Wait, so you're my girlfriend!?" he lets the excitement of his voice drip out slightly. El nods vigorously back at him, smiling all the while. And Mike's pretty sure he could scream in elation, however, he knows that is girly and holds that too himself.

But he shakes his head and brings his head closer to his girlfriends, *his girlfriends!* He rests his forehead against hers and they're both laughing.

"Wow, I never thought in a million years I'd ever have a girlfriend, not just that, but one that's as beautiful and amazing as you are" he admits to the girl, who softens. She pulls away slightly, wanting to meet his gaze.

She raises a gentle hand to his cheek, which he melts into, "Mike, I'm lucky too" she says to him, and he can feel himself vibrating in excitement, and all he wants to do is kiss her.

So, bravely enough, he pulls her closer to him, hesitating slightly as he tilts his head, but feeling El's arms curling up around his neck, gives him all the permission to do so, as he swoops in, closing the gap between them.

And he's pretty sure he's on cloud nine when their lips touch. It's sweet and tender like all of their kisses, but he moves his head slightly, moving their lips against one another, and he *really* likes that feeling. And it seems El does too, because she moves her head just as he did, and a slight gasp emits from her.

They hold each other tight, not wanting the moment to end, but the

need for air becomes too great, so they pull away slowly, both of their eyes still closed, basking in the moment.

"Wow" Mike breathes, opening his eyes to see El doing the same, a light blush on her cheeks. "Wow", she returns, giggling up to him and he pulls her to him in a tight hug.

"We can do that more now...right?" El questions into his ear, he pulls away from her slightly, "Kiss?" he asks her hesitantly, and El nods eagerly, which makes Mike chuckle lightly. "Yes, boyfriends and girlfriends can kiss, but...just each other" he shrugs his shoulders.

El nods, "Yes, no...cheating?" he can tell she's asking if she's using the right words, in which Mike nods his head, "Yeah, stuff like that is just between you and me" he smiles to her, in which she returns.

Mike quickly takes a look on the nearby clock on the wall and sighs, "We should get back, the dance is almost over and I don't want Hopper freaking out on me" he jokes, in which El laughs lightly, "He won't kill you" she quips back as Mike takes her hand in his as he leads them back slowly to the gymnasium.

"We'll see about that" he jokes as he pulls El to his side, both of them giggling to one another, as they bask in this moment alone, just being with each other.

She wishes the night would never end, that she could just sit and talk with Mike and the other's in the smelly gym for all eternity. However, she would also like chances to be with *just* Mike too. But, in this night, she finally felt *normal*. And not just that, but she had a boyfriend, an *actual boyfriend!* Who just so happened to be the person whom she only ever dreamed about being with after the many shows she watched and learned what a boyfriend and girlfriend were.

She has many memories of what it would be like if Mike asked her out. And to her delight, she had finally gotten that moment, and it was more perfect than she could ever imagine.

But, the music had stopped playing, and the lights that danced around the gym were gone, and the normal, harsh glowing lights

returned.

El could feel sadness seep into her knowing the night was over. But, as the other kids trickled out of the gym, Mike and the others held back, not wanting to get lost in the crowd, but also allowing them more time together.

However, that too ended, and now she found herself, hand in hand with Mike, leaving the gym. She casts one more sad look at the gym, locking away this special night into her purest memories, before she turns her attention back ahead of her.

She rests her head gently onto Mike's shoulder as they walk into the parking lot, her eyes find Hopper's stout body, and she can see that his eyes are squinted at them. She feels slightly giddy in that moment, knowing that seeing she and Mike together, isn't his most favorite thing.

The group moves together to stand before Hopper and Joyce, Hopper turns to her, "You have a good time kid?" he asks. She smiles brightly, as she moves closer to Mike, not wanting to leave his warm embrace.

She feels Mike move his head to Hopper, "You really had me fooled, I thought she wasn't coming" he admits. Hopper chuckles, "Well, thought it would be fun, I like to torture you somewhat" he grins at the kid who rolls his eyes.

"So, does this mean El can come out now?" Mike question floats in the air. And El even quickly looks at the older man, surprised by Mike's question, but happy he asked it. Hopper sighs, "Well, it's going to be a slow process, and we're going to have to come up with up some rules, just to make sure we're all on the same page".

And on the word rules, all the kids sigh. But Hopper gives them a look, "Hey, I just told you guys that you'll be able to hang out some, take what you can get" he stresses to them, and El huffs.

"Come on guys, it's getting late" Joyce says as she rubs Will's shoulders affectionately. They all nod in return as each of them disperse, waving goodbye. El, however, lingers closer to Mike, truly not wanting to say goodbye.

But the voice of Nancy from the other side of the parking lot startles them, "Mike, come on we need to go!" Nancy calls, and El feels her heart sink slightly.

"I'll be there in a minute!" he calls back, turning to El, their eyes meet, but she feels the looming presence of her new father nearby.

El turns and looks at Hopper, and she gives him a look. He sighs and rolls his eyes and points at the two of them, "Three minutes" is all he says, as he jumps into the cruiser, his back to the kids.

El sighs in relief, having one last moment alone with Mike to say goodbye. They move close to one another. "I don't want to say goodbye" she admits sadly, but Mike tugs on her hands so that she looks up at him.

"Hey, remember, no goodbyes only 'see you later's', okay?" his voice is sad, she can hear it. She sighs heavily, but nodding to his words.

"I hope 'soon', is actually *soon*" she admits, and Mike nods in return. "Me too, and it will, I promise, I'll wear Hopper down each time he holds me away from you" he says with determination, which makes El giggle.

"I'll do the same" she states, and now they're both looking at each other, and she so wants to kiss him again. And she can feel that he wants the same. So, being the bold one for once, she shifts ever so slightly to get closer to the *much* taller boy, she stands on her tiptoes and curls her hand up behind Mike's head, bringing him closer, so their lips connect with one another.

She's pretty sure she every bit of her body lights up every time they kiss, and she loves it, hoping the feeling never ends. She then feels Mike pull her closer, and she sighs into the kiss.

But then Hopper's voice springs them apart, "Come on kid, we've got to go!" They look at each other with bashful expressions, but neither of them ashamed of the occurrence.

However, she knows she needs to go as she slowly departs from the boy, making her way to the cruiser. She shuts the heavy door, and

looks out the window to her boyfriend, *something she will never get used to*, she decides.

"Bye Mike, thank you!" she cries out in which he waves back and yells back, "Thank you El, this was the best night ever!" he then chuckles into the night, as El giggles in return.

She feels herself relax back into the cruiser, her heart fuller than ever before, and she cannot wait for what's to come next.

Yeah, holy cow! Is all I can say! I greatly apologize for the extremely long wait! I've been struggling a lot with anxiety and panic attacks and trying to take care of myself while also trying to work a job, an internship and life as well! But, this chapter was immensely long as well and it takes me awhile to weed through the last chapter to match everything up. But, yeah this chapter was 68 pages and close to 25,000 words! Longest chapter I have EVER written, so I hope the length makes up for my tardiness, and I will be updating Stranger Tides next!

And, the next chapters are going to be more my own thoughts as to what happens next until we actually get season 3. And, honestly do you guys think that repeating scenes are too...repetitive, or do you like it? That's what I struggled with as well because even though I'm writing different perspectives, it's kind of the same thing. So, please let me know your honest opinions without being TOO harsh, just looking for opinions to improve my writing. But, again, I'm hoping the other chapters won't be THIS wordy.

So, as always thanks again for sticking by and PLEASE REVIEW! It's what keeps me going!

7. The First Visit (Hopper's POV)

I don't think you guys know how much I appreciated all of the love and support you sent my way, the reviews brought tears to my eyes and made me so happy that I am writing this story. And thank you for the positive feedback as well, I feel more confident in the going back and forth between chapters, and I'm so happy you voiced that!

Anyways, I'm sure you're all ready for the next chapter, so here it is!

P.S. Did you guys see that adorable video of the Stranger Things kids wrapping? I just about died with the cuteness! They better release a trailer soon, I don't know how much longer I can last!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Chapter 4: The First Visit (Hopper's POV).

He can't help but tap his fingers nervously on the steering wheel as he drives his teenage daughter home from her first dance, and her first actual public appearance. In his mind, he's thinking about the possibility of someone noticing her, but he also knows that if someone did, there probably would have been trouble.

He keeps throwing glances over at the girl who is currently supporting her head on her bent arm, gazing with wide eyes out the window. A small smile remains plastered to her face all the way home. As she lets out little lovesick sighs here and there.

When they finally pull up to their usual parking spot, El eases out of the car, and walks a little lighter than usual to the front steps.

With a quick light flick of her head, the locks are unlocked, and they step through the door. Warmth greets them from the fire he left smoldering in the corner of the cabin, which he is thankful for, since the evening had been fairly cool.

He places his hat and jacket on his usual hook, El doing the same,

however, she doesn't pay attention to the fact that she totally missed the hook and her hamidown jacket from Nancy crumbles to the floor.

Hopper looks at the jacket, and then back to El who flutters over to the couch and lays down looking up at the ceiling with a dazed, dopey smile.

He can't help but roll his eyes as he bends down, his knees cracking as he does so, picking up her jacket and placing it on the hook, along with his.

In the usual circumstances he would bark after her to pick up the fallen jacket. But, there's a light airiness that floats about her, that, in truth puzzles him, but he can also probably guess *why* without too much thinking.

Hopper sighs as he moves towards the couch, sitting down where El's feet have landed. The girl doesn't move or say anything, so he figures he should be the one to do so.

"So, was it everything you'd thought it would be?" his voice is low. El lets out a dreamy sigh as she sits up, tucking her dress and knees underneath her as she smiles broadly at him.

"It was...amazing, and perfect, and....and I can't think of any other way to describe it" she shrugs her shoulders at him as she looks off all dreamy in another direction.

It stunned him slightly, for, he had never seen her act this way. Usually, after a visit with Mike and her other friends, she seemed saddened from having to depart from them, the uncertainty of their next visit always looming.

So, he chooses to voice his thoughts, "Uh...how was it with your friends...and uhm...Mike?" he drags out. El's eyes are immediately on him, as he watches a blush form on her face. She ducks her head, her smile still present.

Now this grabs his attention. "El....did something happen?" he quips an eyebrow at her. She moves her head up slightly, now not wanting to meet his eyes.

And now his protective father beast begins to stir within his stomach. "El", he states a little firmer this time, as she pulls her knees tighter to her body.

She's contemplating telling him, he can tell. And this worries him slightly, so, he pulls out his big guns as he moves closer to her, knowing she won't be able to refuse, "El, remember, ' ".

And her eyes finally turn up to him, and she lets out a long breath, pushing her feet to hang off the couch she fiddles with her fingers slightly. "I know" she whispers, not meeting him.

He moves closer to her and tucks an arm around her, "E, you know you can talk to me, no matter what" he gives her a tight squeeze.

She sighs again, turning her head towards him, "I...just don't want you to be mad" her voice aches with worry as her big eyes search his face. And now, the monster within him stirs even more, '*did that punk Wheeler kid do something to her!?*', it growls in stomach.

But, he swallows the anger that wants to bubble out, he coughs instead, "Uh...okay El, you've got to let me know, I'm a little worried now" he states honestly.

She nods her head, understanding his words, "It's Mike" she states, and the smile creeps back onto her face.

He can feel his fist clenching into a fist, just waiting for her words to be the worst case scenario, but he waits for her to continue, debating on whether or not he'll be pulling out his gun and chasing down Wheeler.

"What about Mike?" he tries to sound casual, but he's pretty sure his voice sounds judging. El giggles slightly, "Mike...he took me aside, and brought me to the cafeteria" she starts, her dreamy look returning as if replaying the scene over in her head.

His fist clench even more, his knuckles turning white. "Yeah", he says through clenched teeth.

El nods her head, "He took me to the cafeteria, and brought me to the spot where..." and she trails off, evaluating her next words.

Hopper's pretty sure he's about to combust if she doesn't finish, but El finally opens her mouth and whispers, "Where...he first kissed me", and now her face lights up even more so than a Christmas tree, and at her words, Hopper feels himself relax slightly.

But, then it dawns on him, "Wait, the parking lot wasn't your first kiss?" he asks somewhat confused, and at this El whips her head to him with wide eyes, "You watched!?" she says startled, and now Hopper is staring at her with gaping mouth, not sure as to what to say.

"I..uh..." he trails off feeling as though now *he* was the one being questioned. El folds her arms over her chest giving him a deep stare, one that he's pretty sure has killed many men.

But, then he remembers, *he's* the parent, and shouldn't be the one on trial. Shaking his head, he returns the stare, "You're thirteen El, I'm allowed to know what goes on in your life, especially if it involves *some boy*" he drawls.

At this El rises to her feet, hands on her hips, "Mike's not just *some boy*" she repeats, her anger mounting,, "And we've kissed a couple times too" she throws in for good measure, which makes Hopper brain ignite in surprise.

"That's why Mike pulled me to the cafeteria, he asked me to be his girlfriend...so he's my boyfriend!" she states matter of factly, and Hopper's pretty sure he's stopped breathing.

'*Boyfriend, girlfriend?*' the protective father echoes through his head. He's pretty sure he's dumbfounded by his new daughters declaration. His blue eyes meet her fiery amber ones, she is set in her way, her eyes daring him to speak.

He shakes his head out of its deep thoughts, he stands, just so that he can feel somewhat in control of this situation, "Boyfriend!?" he shouts down to the girl, who gives him a tight nod. "Yes, Mike asked me to be his girlfriend, and I said 'yes'".

His eyes tighten, "El, you're both thirteen, you haven't seen each other for a year, besides, what do you even *know* about a

relationship?" he questions her.

She looks up at him with a soft, knowing expression, "A relationship is between two people who care deeply about each other....Mike...Mike has been there, he's waited, *I* waited" she points to her chest. "We both hurt when we are apart, we both want to be near one another...it's...it's unexplainable" her eyes well up with emotions.

Hopper takes in the smaller girl who stares up at him with fierce determination, and he sighs. Deep down he *knows*, he *knew*, this event would be coming sooner rather than later. He honestly hoped it would be later, but, it seems life just likes to continuously throw him curve balls to see how he reacts.

He drops his shoulders and releases his 'tough guy' demeanor, knowing it will get nowhere with this strong willed girl.

He moves to sit on the couch as he rubs an anxious hand through his thinning hair. He takes in a deep breath, looking up to see El staring back, he gives her a soft smile as he reaches out and takes her hand. This action seems to lighten El too as she drops her stare and gives him a gentle look.

"El...I'm sorry...it's just *a lot* to take in, to understand" he starts slowly, making sure she's listening. "I know that there's something between you and Mike that's different than other relationships by any means, and...to be honest...I knew this talk would be coming, but I just hoped it was later" he cracks her a smile, which she returns.

"This...it's just going to be a lot to take in is all" he shrugs his shoulders. "I mean, first I adopt a teenage telekinetic daughter, and barely a day later she's got a boyfriend".

El giggles at this ducking her head slightly. "Look, El, I know there's nothing I can say or do to maybe persuade you to wait a bit to start dating, but I know that's not going to happen" he states, while El nods lightly.

"I...it's going to take a bit to get used to is all, and...there are things we'll have to talk about down the road" he gives her a look, in which

El furrows her eyebrows at.

"What other things?" she asks, and Hopper freezes in the moment, he *really* didn't want to get into what was his main concern in his mind with having his daughter dating, and he was honestly hoping that he might get Joyce to talk about the 'birds and the bees' with her, because he knew *some* stuff about females but not everything.

He looks back at the girl, who's continuing to look at him, awaiting his answer. And, even though she has grown and so has Mike and their friends, there is still innocence wrapped into their features. He sighs, making a decision in his head, "Like I said, we'll talk about it down the road, when the situation arises" he cringes slightly at his words, hoping the *situation* he was thinking about wouldn't even come until she was out on her own.

However, he's not stupid, he knows things probably *will* happen, but he's hoping at least for awhile, that conversation won't need to be had. His light eyes search her face as she ponders his words, and she eventually nods and says "Okay", he lets out a breath in relief, thankful she doesn't press anymore.

Hopper stands to his feet and rubs the girls hair affectionately, she moves away with a squeak, "Ah, dad!" she cries and he pulls his hand back. "You're going to ruin it" she frowns up to him.

He can't help but chuckle, "Hate to break it to you kid, but it's going to go back to it's regular curls once you take a shower" he shrugs, placing his hands into his pockets, watching El's eyes go wide.

"Nooo" she whispers patting her tamed hair with a sad expression. Hopper rolls his eyes, "Don't worry kid, as it grows out, it probably won't be that curly anyways, and....I can try to help you keep it tame, I'll ask Nancy what she did", he tries to soothe the girl.

El's face lights up at his words as she launches herself into his arms, "Thank you!" she cries into his chest and he chuckles in return, "Anything for you kid" he sighs as he returns the hug, embracing this quiet moment together, as he silent ponders how many of them they will have together.

The days pass by quietly in the cabin, he notices that El seems quieter than usual, and she spends more time holed up in her room talking with her friends over her Supercom, he knows that the majority of the time is spent talking to Mike, but, he lets it pass for now, knowing the kids are on school vacation.

It's when she silently pads out from her room one morning, a small frown and furrowed eyebrows are painted across her face, that he knows something is troubling her.

So, after he finishes making their breakfast he sets the plates down on the kitchen table, he watches her silently as she pokes at her pancake.

She sits silently, and only takes a couple of bites of her meal. Hopper finally sighs and clears his throat before he speaks, "Alright, what's going on?" his voice strains across the table.

El shrugs her shoulders as she continues to poke at her food, bringing a small morsel up to her mouth slowly. Hopper rolls his eyes, '*definitely a teenager*', his mind reminds him.

He huffs, "El, come on, if something's bothering you, then you need to speak up", he says as he places a large forkful of pancake into his mouth. He chews it thoroughly, awaiting El's answer.

She lets out her own long breath and looks up to Hopper with her amber eyes, "Mike and everyone keep talking about this day, and I've never heard of it", she starts as she places her fork onto the table.

El looks down at her lap where she fiddles with her fingers. Hopper nods his head, "What is this day anyways?" Hopper asks as he takes a sip of his orange juice, looking over the rim at the girl.

There's a beat of silence, and then she whispers, "Christmas", and it all dawns on Hopper. He mentally slaps himself in the head, he had totally forgotten about the holiday, and that she had never experienced *any* holiday for that matter.

He had found her right after the new year, and they had spent so much time focusing on her needs, he never found the holidays

important, but now, Christmas was only a handful of days away, and of course her friends would be idly chatting about the upcoming day, for, it was a day full of excitement, especially for kids.

Hopper swallows his juice and places the glass back on the table, he doesn't look up at her when he speaks, "What have they told you about Christmas?"

He can see her lift her head quickly from the corner of his eye after he's asked the question. "Everything, about santa, how there's gifts, and colorful lights, and a tree!" she bounces in her seat in excitement.

Hopper finally turns his full attention to the girl, "Did they now?" he nods to her with a small smile. She beams at him, "Yes! It sounds cool, can we do Christmas?" she asks the man.

He looks her over, and sees the anticipation dancing in her eyes. Christmas, sure he's celebrated the holiday on countless occasions, however, he can't even remember the last time he even got a tree.

His mind begins to drift slightly, he knows deep down the reason he practically stopped celebrating any holiday was the fact that his daughter was no longer here, and it broke his heart each time a holiday came around the corner.

But now...now he had another daughter, one who had *never* experienced the joy that came with each holiday, especially Christmas. Her hopeful eyes swam with the want and need to celebrate the holiday, so, he sighed, resting his fork against his plate.

He looks into her eyes, "You really want to celebrate Christmas?" he asks, even though he knows what the answer will be, she jumps up, "Yes! With a tree and everything!" she says with her hands clapped together.

Hopper can't help but chuckle at her nodding his head, "Alright kid, I'll get you a tree, and we'll decorate it, okay?"

She jumps up and down, "Can you make sure it's a big one!" her eyes gleam up at him. His laugh rumbles in his chest, "I'll try to do the best I can" he smiles to her, and within a moment she's running into

her room, and he can hear the static as her Supercom comes to life.

He hears her call out into the device with muster, "Mike, come in Mike!". Hopper begins to clear the table as he shakes his head at her excitement. He then hears faintly, "Hopper's getting us a tree!", and he can't help but smile at her elation.

So, Hopper follows through with his promise, and the next day he hauls in a decently sized tree, as he drags in a couple boxes of colorful lights, new ornaments and a star to place at the top.

El's enthusiasm for decorating the tree doesn't falter the entire time. A permanent smile dances across her face as she and Hopper hang the ornaments one at a time.

When they step back and admire their handiwork, El's eyes never leave the twinkling lights. And as Hopper eyes the tree himself, he can't help but feel a sense of joy wash over him.

When Hopper directs El to bed, she shakes her head, "I want to sleep on the couch, watch the lights" she states as she curls up on the said item, her eyes glued to the symbol of Christmas.

Hopper can't help but chuckle and shrug his shoulders stating, "Suite yourself" as he heads off to his own bed. He turns his head slightly to witness El sitting up on the couch and admiring the tree. A soft smile remains on his face as he heads to bed.

As he heads into work the next morning, El is still fast asleep on the couch, and he decides to leave the dimmed lights plugged in for the girl, as he tiptoes out the door.

While driving into the station, Hopper mulls over the next step in his mind. Christmas is only three days away and he hasn't gotten El anything to put under the tree, let alone knowing what he *should* actually get her. He also mentally reminded himself that they both needed stockings as well.

He had only had a young daughter, not a teenage, telekinetic daughter, so, he was at a loss as to what to get the girl so that she

had a handful of gifts to open under the tree. 'Maybe I'll ask Joyce', trickles through his head as he pulls into the station and walks in through the door.

The morning for Hopper stretches by in a dull blur. It's not until the late afternoon does an unexpected visitor stop his eyelids from fluttering close and drift off to sleep.

A quiet voice jostles him awake, "Uh..Hopper?" And at this Hopper blinks his tired eyes, as he notices a shaggy haired male closes the door to his office.

He hasn't seen him since the night of the snowball, and after what El has told him, he can't help but give him a tight stare, "Wheeler", he growls in his tired voice as he raises his hands to rub the sleep away from his eyes.

Hopper listens as the Wheeler boy moves to sit in the chair that sits opposite him on the other side of his desk. Once he has finished rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he removes his hands from his face and gives the teen a look.

"What are you here for, kid?" he questions. Mike moves his lips hesitantly, "El told me that you guys got a tree...that you guys are celebrating Christmas?" his voice sounds strained.

Hopper quirks an eyebrow up at him, "What of it?", his paternal instincts taking control of the situation, as the word, *boyfriend*, moves across his mind.

Mike clears his throat, "Uh...well I was just curious if...if the party and I could stop over...Christmas day?" he raises his hand to move a stray piece of his long hair from his eyes.

Hopper evaluates the teens words and huffs, "Look, it's her first Christmas, I figured we could celebrate it toge-"

But he's cut short as Mike's voice cuts through his, "Exactly! So, we should be able to see her too!" his voice begins to rise.

The older man crinkles his eyes together even more so, "Watch your tone, Wheeler" he bites, and this pulls the teen back into his chair,

who sighs heavily, "Look, we've all got her something small to give her, and...we just wanted to give her gifts to her in person. Not just that, but we thought we could do the traditional Christmas things with her too", he adds on.

"Traditional Christmas things? What's that mean?" Hopper quips to the teen as he folds his arms over his chest.

A small smile tugs at Mike's face, "You know, like, baking cookies, telling Christmas stories, playing games...stuff like that".

Hopper evaluates Mike's words before he leans forward, "What about your family, won't they be missing you kids?" he tries to argue, but it seems futile, as the smile on Mike's face grows larger, "Oh, we all do Christmas in the morning, and our parents always get together for drinks at the end of the night, and we just end up in the basement anyways" he starts. "And, I already told my mom that there was a new kid that we had met, and had no friends to spend Christmas with, and she said it was fine for us to go", he gives Hopper a winning smile.

This pulls on Hopper's attention, "You told her about El?" his voice strains lightly. Mike shakes his head, "I never told my mom who she was, or that she was even a girl, I figured you'd come up with some story anyways, I mean...you did adopt her" he shrugs his shoulders.

Hopper lets out his held breath, he rubs at his forehead, feeling a headache coming on. He honestly can't understand how determined these kids are, especially the one who is sitting directly in front of him.

He removes his hand from his brow and huffs. "Alright, look, if you kids want to come over, *after*, you've finished your stuff with your family, I guess it wouldn't harm anything for you guys to come over".

Mike jumps to his feet at his words, "Thanks Hopper I-!", but Hopper holds up his hand to stop him. "But, you need to come in groups, at different times, and you'll leave at different times to, got it?" he gives the teen a stern look.

He falters slightly, but, he eventually nods in return, "Okay, that's fair

I guess, thanks Hop", he finishes as he stands and moves around the chair to leave.

However, Hopper stops him, "Wheel-Mike, wait a second" he calls out to the teen who stops in his steps and turns to look at the older man.

Hopper gives him a slight grin, "Just wanted to say...El told me something interesting the other day", he watches as Mike furrows his brows in confusion, "Oh?" he quips, his attention on the older man.

Hopper nods slowly coming to stand in front of the ever growing teen. "Yeah, she uh...well she told me you asked her something at the end of the dance there".

And at his words, Mike's eyes grow wide, he turns away slightly from the older man, "Oh", he says quietly, and Hopper nods in return, "Oh is right, kid, I knew you and El were close, but...this whole-" and he gestures wildly between Mike and to the direction he presumes where El is at, "*Thing*, between the two of you, there needs to be a discussion".

Mike whips his head up to the older man and squints at him, "It's not just some 'thing' that's going on between El and I, we're in a relationship with each other" his words are firm.

Hopper can't hold back the scoff he lets off, "Yeah, like you two know much about being in a relationship", he throws at the kid as he moves to sit behind his desk again, he can feel Mike's dark eyes boring into his back.

Mike approaches his desk, standing before it, "You just have a problem with the fact that El *likes* me, and I like her too, and....and we want to be together" his changing voice turns into a growl.

Hopper fixes him with a look, "It seems interesting that you seem to think this is something you can actually start with someone like El", his words come out harsher than expected, and he watches Mike's eyes narrow even more so.

"What do you mean by that! Just because El has...powers-" Mike lowers his voice at the last word, "Doesn't mean she isn't a normal

girl, with normal feelings!" he bites back to the older man.

Hopper opens his mouth to speak, but Mike cuts through before he can utter a noise, "And that's not fair! You labeling her as this...this helpless person, El is still learning, I get that, but for you to just assume she doesn't know anything about being in a relationship with someone, that's bullshit!" he throws to him.

This gets Hopper to his feet as he leans over the desk, their eyes glaring daggers at one another, "That's my point kid, she doesn't actually know what it's like to actually *be* with someone romantically, just what she's seen on t.v!" he barks back.

"That doesn't mean she's not human! That she doesn't feel emotions! And obviously if she didn't feel *something* for me, she wouldn't have been reaching out to me for three hundred and fifty three days!" Mike growls, his spitting flying from his mouth, making Hopper back off slightly.

"We have our opportunity now, *you* kept us apart, but...there's always been something there between the two of us, from the moment I took her in from the rain, . " he slows his voice and enunciated each of his words.

Hopper looks at the teen, and he can see that he's trying to hold back tears as his voice warbles slightly, "You have no idea...no idea what it felt like....to not know if she was dead...or alive" Mike stresses.

"But, I knew....I knew deep down that she was okay, and I would have waited forever to know that she was okay" a stray tear leaves Mike's eyes as he shakes his head slightly.

And Hopper can see it, just as he did with El. The passion, the caring, the *love*, behind each of his words, *her* words too. Hopper can see it in Mike's eyes, the determination he has written across his face to prove to him that he does care for El, and that she cares for him too.

So, Hopper backs off slightly, watching the teen his daughter is smitten with, catch his breath as he continues to fight back his tears.

And Hopper knows he can't fight it, he knows that there will be

conflicts in their relationship as everyone does, but...there's also a blossoming flame that could lead to so much more between them, and *that's* what scares him.

But, for now Hopper takes in a long deep breath that fills every free space in his lungs before he exhales and flicks his eyes to the boys, who continues to stare at him with fierce determination.

"Alright, I get it, Mike, I know you and El care about each other, and I know there's nothing I can do to stop any of this from happening" he shrugs his shoulders.

But then he takes a step forward and points a finger to the boy, "What matters, is that if you *ever* hurt her, if you *ever* do something to her that she doesn't want, your throat will be mine kid" he growls lowly, hoping his point gets carried across.

And, as if something dawns on Mike, he softens slightly, "You're afraid", and at this Hopper gives him a quick look, "What do you mean?" he growls.

Mike shakes his head and laughs lightly, "You're afraid I'm going to do something to El, that I'm a hormonal teenage boy, who won't be able to keep his hands off of your daughter".

Not meaning to prove his point, Hopper whips his head to the boy with wide eyes, and Mike lets out a breathy laugh, he points at the older man, "That's what it is, you think I'm going to sleep with her or something the moment we are alone", his voice is full of realization.

"Now, hold on there-" Hopper goes to speak, but Mike cuts him off again, "No, I'll tell you chief", and his voice is deep and determined, his dark eyes meeting the older mans light ones. "I'll *never* do anything to El, I won't push her to do anything, unless she is sure and she is ready", and at this Hopper can feel his stomach growling in anger.

As if Mike can sense this, he holds up his hand in defense, "I'm not saying that stuff is going to happen", he starts, and Hopper tilts his head to the boy, not believing him, "But...I'm also not going to say it *isn't* going to happen, what I'm telling you is that as long as I'm with

El, it'll be all on her, and I want her to understand all that stuff too, and not just through me and my friends".

"Besides, Hop, come on, we're fourteen, I know I'm not ready for any of *that* stuff yet" he contorts his face slightly, and Hopper relaxes his shoulders. "Yeah, that's my fear, *you're fourteen!*" he stresses.

Mike scoffs, "Yeah, and just because you might have been like that when you were a kid, doesn't mean I'm like that. Besides...right now, if I get a moment to just sit and talk with El, that's all that matters to me" he says quietly, his eyes searching Hopper's.

"A whole year we went without seeing each other, just being near her, knowing she's alive, that makes my entire day" he sighs with a soft smile.

Hopper hears every word that the teen says, but he knows, he *knows*, that down the road, this conversation will be *very* different. And he can also feel it deep within his gut that this kid won't be going very far from him, or El for that matter.

So, with a heavy sigh he admits defeat, "Alright kid, I'll believe you *for now*, anyways", and he can't help but fix the teen with a steely glare, which Mike returns.

Mike slumps his shoulders lightly. "But, if I ever catch you-" he starts to warn before Mike rolls his eyes in exasperation, "Yeah, yeah, I know, 'slit my throat'" he mocks in Hopper's even deeper voice.

Hopper shakes his head dismissively, "Anyways, one group will arrive at five, the other five thirty, got it?" he gives Mike a look, showing him this time is non-negotiable, and Mike gives him a tight nod in return.

"Fine, I'll let the others know", he states as he heads for the door once again. But, just as he grabs the door handle he stops and turns to Hopper, "Don't tell El", he says quickly and Hopper can't help but give him a confused look, "I want to surprise her" he smiles, erasing the look from Hopper's face, who only rolls his eyes, "Whatever kid, see you Friday", he dismissively waves him off.

"See ya" Mike throws over his shoulder as he finally opens the door and shuts it behind him. And once he's gone, Hopper slumps into his chair with a deep sigh, not knowing what journey lies before him.

Christmas eve arrives faster than Hopper would like to admit. He had spent the last couple of days buying small gifts here and there for El, desperately trying to find things she would like. He did have to give in and eventually reach out to Nancy and Joyce for some ideas, which they graciously gave.

Now, it was evening and he had made up a special dinner for his new daughter, as he tried to revive his forgotten cooking skills. When he pulled the small ham from the oven and noted that the outside wasn't burnt and it had cooked all the way through, he felt he had achieved a small victory.

Hopper had even splurged and picked up a timeless Christmas movie for him and El to watch once they had finished dinner.

El sat on the couch, in new wintery pajamas he had picked up for her as she clutched her stuffed bear in her arms, bouncing slightly in her seat as she waited for Hopper to put in the movie.

"What's the movie?" El chirps from her seat as Hopper places the rented VHS into the tape player.

Hopper chuckles, "It's called, A Christmas Story, came out sometime last year, kid at the rental store said it was a good one, figured we'd give it a shot", he says over his shoulder, as he fiddles with the t.v, getting it set up to play the movie.

Once the whirring on the device signals that it has started, Hopper backs up from the t.v. and moves to sit next to a wide eyed El on the couch.

The typical commercials for upcoming movies plays before their eyes, and while this goes on, Hopper decides to go to the kitchen and throw together some popcorn.

Once he returns, the movie starts to play out, and El reaches for a

handful of popcorn as they sit back and enjoy the movie.

Hopper finds himself laughing more than he expected as he watched the peculiar Christmas movie play out before him. And, all though El hadn't experienced much comedy or the understanding of comical situations, there were a few that seemed to peak her interest as she giggled along with him.

Out of the corner of his eye, he couldn't help but watch in wonder as the young girl beside him watched in wonder of the movie before her. The way she sat, cross legged on the couch with her head perched on her elbows that were balanced on her bent knees, made her seem like a normal kid. And if you asked anyone, you wouldn't even know that she had spent the first eleven years of her life locked in lab.

Hopper felt a smile tug at his face, knowing that he could finally give this girl something in life to look forward to. Of course he was afraid of the possibility that there were people from the lab watching her, waiting for her to reappear, but, that's why he wanted to take it slow with introducing her to the world, so that she could adapt safely and he would know the risks as trudged through life together.

The movie came to an end, and El turned to Hopper, "That was a great movie, thank you" a gentle smile pulls on her lips. And Hopper can't help but return it, "No problem kid, it's getting late though, it might be time for bed, have to go to bed for santa to come" he chuckles.

And El rolls his eyes at him, which catches his curiosity, "What?" he can't help but ask. El shakes her head with a slight smile, "I know santa doesn't exist" she states plainly, and Hopper feels a bit flabbergasted at her declaration.

"But..how...?" he's lost for words. El continues to smile, "Mike and the others told me about the story, but...they also said kids our age don't really believe in him" she shrugs her shoulder, "It's okay though, I still think it's a nice story".

Hopper lets out a sigh of relief, "Okay, well if you're fine with it, then I guess I won't have to tiptoe around tonight" he jokes and El laughs.

"No, I understand" she states simply as she stands to her feet, stretching her arms above her head, yawning. "It looks like you're ready for bed though" Hopper points out to her, and she gives him an annoyed look.

"Yes, will head to bed" she states as she moves towards him, and unexpectedly she opens her arms and wraps him into a hug, which he slowly returns.

They don't say anything, but they break away, and El says, "Night, dad" over her shoulder as she heads into her room.

He smiles to himself as he whispers a "Night, El", to her retreating form. And it's there he knows his heart had been filled with a feeling he hadn't experienced in a long time: love.

Hopper sets his alarm so that he is up before El, he slips out of his warm bed as he grabs his clumsily wrapped presents and places them underneath the tree. He then moves to fill his and El's stockings with candy and small trinkets.

When the sun begins to creep into the windows, he decides it's probably time for El to wake up, so, he starts making breakfast, knowing the smell will awaken the girl.

And, sure enough, ten minutes later, El's door creaks open. Hopper looks over his shoulder to see El rubbing at her eyes, yawning lightly. "Merry Christmas!" he says to her as she walks into the living room.

She gives him a confused look, "Merry...Christmas?" she whispers. Hopper chuckles, "Yeah, it's what you say to people on Christmas".

El nods her head in understanding looking up at the man with a bright smile, "Merry Christmas!" she returns, and Hopper laughs again as he finishes up their plates for breakfast, bringing them over to the table.

"Alright let's get-", but Hopper is cut off by a squeal, "Presents!" El screams and Hopper flips his head up to see El has spotted the gleaming piles of presents stacked under the tree that glints from the

blinking lights.

"Whoa, there!" Hopper calls out as El makes a direct beeline for the tree, she freezes in her tracks and gives Hopper her great doe eyes.

He can't help but laugh at the excitement the girl has, and he honestly can't blame her, "I know it's your first Christmas, and you're excited and all, but let's eat first, *then* you can attack the pile of presents, okay?" he gives her a look.

El's face falls slightly as she looks between himself and the pile of presents, debating on whether she may not listen to his words. But, her shoulders eventually sag as she turns back towards him, "Fine" she grumbles as she makes her way over.

Hopper places her eggos, bacon and eggs on a pile on her plate just as she sits down, and once she sees her favorite blueberry eggos on her plate, her smile is back.

"Eggos?" she says brightly, and Hopper nods, "It's Christmas, it's a day for bending the rules" he smiles to her, which she returns as she moves to place a long trail of over her entire plate, even her eggs which makes Hopper cringe slightly.

El eats faster than she normally does, and Hopper has to remind her that she needs to slow down before she chokes. She listens for a beat or two, but then she goes back to her quickened pace. He does make her sit and wait until he is done before they bound over to the Christmas tree.

Once breakfast is completed, El washes her sticky hands as she moves to sit in front of the tree, eyeing each present. Hopper pours himself another cup of coffee, before he moves and grabs his old camera from his room.

He holds it up aiming towards El and the tree, "Smile, kid" he says and El whips her head to the older man, and gives him another confused look. He sighs still holding the camera in front of him, "I'm taking a picture, just smile and I'll show you", he explains blandly. She still looks confused but she quickly lets it go and smiles a toothy grin up to the man. A flash goes through the room as the camera spits

out the picture.

"Nice!" he states as he pulls the print from the camera and shakes it lightly letting the print dry. El moves over to him just as the picture begins to develop. He holds it out to her and her eyes widen as she watches herself and their tree come through the dark picture.

"See, we take pictures to document special things, this is definitely one of them" he states, and El smiles at him. He nods to the pile of presents, "Have at it kid, I know you're eager to attack those presents".

And without another word, El dives to the tree and pulls at the first poorly wrapped gift that sits there. Instead of unwrapping the gift in a rage of excitement, El surprises the older man by delicately pulling the tape and wrapping from the box, enjoying the moment that is there.

Once she has revealed the first gift, El's eyes widen as she looks at the box, "Mon...monop...monopoly?" she words out, looking at Hopper for confirmation. He nods, "Yep, Joyce told me you enjoyed playing it with your friends, figured we could play it, or when they start to come over he shrugs".

El's face lights up, "Thank you!" she chirps as she gently places the game to the side and reaches for the next one.

Hopper spends the next half hour watching El experience her first Christmas with the joy of a young child. Every present, not matter if it is a new piece of clothing or a fun new toy, each time her eyes light up and she thanks the man for her new treasures.

Hopper has her stop here and there when she opens a gift, to hold it up so he can snap a few pictures. She seems to enjoy the attention as she continues to paw through the gift pile.

Both Joyce and Nancy had slightly berated Hopper for the lack of 'appropriate' clothing a teenage girl should have. So, with the help of the Wheeler girl, she picked up some 'hip' clothing and dresses, that made El's eyes light up with even more excitement when she examined them.

He had gotten her a handful of card games, books, movies and clothes because he knew that when her friends would come over, they would need *something* to do, because he did NOT want to hear them complaining about there being nothing to do in the small cabin.

Once her pile of presents had disappeared, she moved to hers and Hoppers stockings, removed them from the wall and approached the man with both in her hand. With a bright smile, she hands him his stocking.

"Thanks, E" he says with a smile as he takes the stocking from the girl. She again eagerly dives into her red stocking pulling candy and small trinkets from the overly large sock. Hopper can't wipe the smile that stays on his face as he watches her.

After El has been satisfied with her gifts, she gives Hopper a soft look, "Thank you" she whispers to him. He reaches forward and ruffles her curls, a favorite past time of his, "Anytime kid, did you enjoy your first Christmas?" he asks with raised eyebrows.

She grins, "The best" she states simply as she looks through all of her new belongings once again. Hopper stands to his feet as he begins to ball up the discarded wrapping paper and throw them into the trash, "Glad to hear kid, why don't you bring your new belongings into your room?"

El nods eagerly as she collects her new things and brings them into her room, delicately placing them throughout her room.

She eventually moves to the bathroom, where he hears her shower, and when she emerges she is wearing a pair of new jeans and a knitted light green sweater Nancy had picked out for the young girl.

"You look good kid" Hopper states as she moves across the room. She ducks her head in embaressment as she moves towards her room. She doesn't fully close the door, so he can hear the static of the Supercom come to life.

He casually glances at the clock and smiles lightly, it's four thirty, meaning he's pretty sure the first group of kids will be making their way over soon.

"Mike?" he hears El's soft, muffled voice in her room. He listens carefully as she continues to reach out to the boy with no luck. After ten minutes or so he hears her give a light huff as she slams the Supercom onto her bed.

At this, Hopper stands and knocks on her door lightly, "Hey El, everything okay?" he asks as he gently pushes the door open.

He frowns slightly as he sees her sitting her body in a tight ball as she glares at the Supercom on her bed, a stray tear cascades down her cheek. He approaches her slowly, "He's not answering" her voice is muffled against her jeans.

Hopper sighs, placing a gentle hand on the girls shoulder. "He's probably busy, his family celebrates Christmas too" Hopper tries to assure the girl, but, he also knows that the said boy is probably moving through the forest eagerly on his way here.

She lets out a long breath, "He said he would call" she mumbles sadly. Hopper huffs, "It's still early kid, maybe he'll call later", he tries, but she shakes her head, "Miss him...and the others, wish I could see them".

And it's almost impossible for Hopper to break his promise to the Wheeler kid seeing how sad she is looking, but he knows it won't be long, so he tries to speak again, "Well...why don't we try-" but before he can finish, there's a knock on the door. And immediately El perks up, but not in an excited way, but in fear.

She turns her terrified eyes to him as she tries to hide away even more so against her bed. He looks at the girl with a soft look, "Don't worry, I'll go see who it is", he says as he stands and moves across the room.

And he knows *exactly* who is at the door, but he knows the kids want to surprise her, so he moves as if he doesn't know who is standing on the other side.

He opens the door and there stands Mike, Will and Dustin with beaming smiles on their faces. Hopper holds a finger up to his mouth to gesture to the boys to remain quiet. They nod their heads in

understanding as they walk through the door.

He can see out of the corner of his eye that the Wheeler boy is looking anxiously about, looking for the girl he cannot wait to see.

Hopper rolls his eyes before he turns and calls out to the cabin, "Hey E, it's okay why don't you come out and say hi!" his voice booms through the cabin.

His eyes fall on the girls door that he sees creaks open slowly, as El moves outside of her room, a curious look on her face, "Dad who-?" but her question falls short as Hopper moves out of the way to reveal the faces of Mike, Will and Dustin standing in the doorway.

He can't help but smile broadly when El's hands come up to her mouth as she gasps, her eyes going wide, he can see them tearing up slightly too. She doesn't move from her spot as she continues to stare at the boys in the doorway, but he's pretty sure her light brown eyes are only focused on one boy in particular.

"Hi, El", Mike takes a tentative step forward, as El lowers her hands from her mouth, a bright smile growing on her face as she snuffles and launches herself forward, running across the living room, as she lands squarely into Mike's awaiting arms.

The force of her run nearly knocks Mike to the floor, but he stabilizes himself just enough as El's arms wrap around his neck, and his around her waist, they hold onto each other tightly.

"Mike!" El squeals in delight as they rock against one another in their hug. Mike laughs, "I'm glad you're excited to see me!" his voice is muffled against her shoulder.

They stay embraced for awhile, and even though he's happy to see El happy, especially on Christmas, the long contact has Hopper's stomach swirl, so he loudly clears his throat, bringing the two teens back to reality.

Hopper watches as they break apart slightly, and then realizing the situation they're in, they let go of each other, each with matching blushes and dopey smiles.

"Geez, I thought you'd never let her go Mike, I'd like to get a hug in with El too!" Dustin steps forward as El moves to hug the curly haired boy.

"Merry Christmas!" she chirps as she envelopes the boy happily, "Merry Christmas to you too, El!" Dustin says happily as they end their hug in a much shorter time than El's and Mike's previous one.

She then side steps and her gaze meets Will's shy one, "Uh, hi El, merry Christmas" his voice is light and El smiles as she moves and gives Will a small hug, "Merry Christmas to you" she whispers, smiling as she pulls away.

Hopper softens watching the kids interact with one another, as they group together and chat lightly.

"Max and Lucas are on their way, we had to come in two groups" Mike moves so that he is right next to El to explain this to her.

Hopper catches a look on El's face that he's not sure if he understands just yet, but she gives the boy a small smile and says, "Okay", in a small voice.

"So, did you have a nice Christmas?" Mike asks, and within seconds El jumps out of her shy self and goes on to explain all the Christmas gifts she received today, and she tugs on Mike's hand, interlacing their fingers together as she pulls him to her room, Dustin and Will following along.

And, El closes her door behind her, and as she does so, Hopper stands alone in the living room, contemplating if he should say anything. Because currently, his daughter was in her bedroom, with a shut door, with three boys, one being her boyfriend.

But, just as he's about to move towards the door, he can hear the kids bellowing laughter echo in her small room, and he realizes, he's being a bit protective, so, he backs off, and moves towards the kitchen to get dinner ready.

No sooner had he placed the turkey in the oven with a dozen

potatoes does he hear another knock on the door.

Hopper sighs as he brushes off his hands and moves towards the door, knowing this is the rest of the gang showing up.

Opening the door, he's met with the two faces of Max and Lucas who give him tight smiles, "Uh, hey Hopper, merry Christmas" Lucas offers as Hopper holds the door open for them.

Hopper nods to them, "Yeah, merry Christmas to you two as well". They both take off their jackets and shoes and place them on the hooks. He turns towards El's room, "El, the rest of your friends are here, come and greet them!" he calls.

And a couple seconds later, Dustin, Will, Mike and El (still holding hands), exit her room and make their way to Lucas and Max.

They all exchange 'merry Christmas' with one another, and El moves to hug Lucas. However, out of the corner of his eye, Hopper watches as she gives Max a tentative look, barely giving her a smile, before she is back next to Mike's side, her hand in his.

"Huh", he mutters to himself as he watches the kids interact with one another. "Hey, El got a bunch of new games for Christmas, let's break them out!" Dustin states excitedly and all the friends agree, as they move once again to El's room and disappear behind her door.

Hopper shakes his head, watching the kids just being themselves, and he can see very easily that they are *very* much teenagers, wanting to be left to their own things without any adult present.

He sighs, moves to the fridge and grabs himself a beer. He exhales a relaxing breath as he settles into the couch, flicking on the t.v to watch a bit of a game for a bit before dinner is ready.

Hopper can hear the kids chatting idly and laughing in El's room. And he feels his chest warm lightly at the aspect of El having a good time with kids her own age. He realizes then, that, this will have to occur more often, for he knows El needs interactions with these kids, or she will probably go insane.

He's just about to stand up and check on the turkey, when El's door suddenly bursts open, El moving quickly away from her bedroom, Mike hot on her heels.

"El, wait, what's wrong!?" he cries trying to keep up with the girl. He watches in shock as El sniffles lightly before growling, "Nothing!" and slipping outside, onto the porch slamming the door in Mike's face.

Hopper doesn't really understand what just happened, but he stands there puzzled, he looks to Mike, who seems heartbroken.

"Uhhhh" Hopper starts, wanting to understand what's going on, before Mike's dark eyes flicker towards him. "What happened?" the older man asks, and Mike huffs, "I-I don't know she just, kind of got upset about something and stormed off" he shrugged, as his eyes flicked between him and the door, debating on going after her or not.

Hopper's about to speak again, but he watches as a look of determination flashes onto Mike's face, as he whips his head up and seizes the outside door open. He watches him go, and now Hopper stands debating on if he should follow them.

But, instead he moves to the window in the kitchen that overlooks the porch, he doesn't want to spy, but he wants to make sure El is okay, and that this *punk* didn't do something to upset her.

The windows to the cabin are new, and thick, so he can't hear anything but muffled words as El and Mike sit on the old swing together.

He can see that El is tucked up within herself, and Mike is desperately trying to get himself into her little world. The minutes tick by as he watches their interaction. Mike's movements are slow and gentle, and it seems he's speaking in a way that is slowly getting El to unwind. And, then, he watches the two teens lean forward and embrace each other in a tight hug.

Mike plants a gentle kiss on her forehead before he stands, and gives her a 'wait here gesture'. Hopper pulls away from the window as if it shocked him, and busies himself in the kitchen, not wanting Mike to catch him watching their interaction with one another.

When the boy re-enters he seems happier, but he makes a beeline straight for El's room, "Everything okay?" Hopper shoots to Mike before he reaches the doorway. Mike gives him a grin over the shoulder, "Almost!" he says before he disappears behind the door.

And two seconds later, he re-emerges with a confused looking Max. Mike is muttering to her lowly as he pulls her to the door and nearly pushes her outside. "Just go, you'll understand in a minute", he explains through a strained voice.

The redhead sighs, "You better be right Wheeler" she growls before she disappears onto the porch.

Mike lets out a heavy sigh, and as if he can feel Hopper's eyes on him, he turns and meets the older man's eyes. Hopper quirks an eyebrow up to the boy, waiting for an explanation.

The middle Wheeler rolls his eyes as he approaches the older man, "Look, El had a misunderstanding about Max is all, but...now I think everything will get cleared up now" he smiles.

Hopper gives him a look, "What *kind* of misunderstanding?" he growls to the boy, his last answer not being enough for him.

Mike shrugs his shoulders, "It's...it's just when El snuck out to find me, she went to the school, and she found me, but Max and I were hanging out-" and Mike stops when Hopper gives him a stern look, and Mike holds up his hands in defense, "NO, not like that, Hop, we were talking in the gym, and...trust me, I didn't even *like* Max when Dustin and Lucas invited her into the group!" he hastily explains. "But, El was just jealous, and...I think with an explanation, the two girls would actually be really good friends, besides, El needs a girl to talk to with four boys around".

Hopper shakes his head at the boy, "That better be true kid, because remember, if you hurt her-", "You'll kill me, I know" Mike strains to the older man who huffs in return.

He's about to speak again, but he's interrupted by the door from the outside opening, with Max and El trailing inside, both giggling and with grins on their faces.

Mike's face turns to relief as he meets the girls, "Everything okay?" he asks softly and both the girls nod in agreement, "All good" El chirps as she grabs both Mike's and Max's hands, "Let's get back to the game!" she cheers as she drags them both along to her room.

Hopper watches them leave, a sigh escaping him, not knowing what he got himself into adopting a hormonal teenage daughter.

The night drags on, and soon Hopper has the kids fed, they move into the kitchen and show El the art of baking sugar cookies, which, turns more into a mess of kids and ingredients who never stop laughing.

Hopper's pretty sure he wants to rip his ears off, but seeing El so excited with her friends, her contagious laugh ringing through the cabin, he lets his annoyance drift by.

By the end of the night, the kids are exchanging gifts with one another. Most of them are for El from her friends, and he can see the love behind her eyes when she unwraps each of them. Giving the gift giver a tight hug afterwards.

After their gifts are exchanged the kids arrange themselves around the living room as they sit in front of the t.v, watching a cartoon of some sort. He busies himself with picking up the mess the kids made in the kitchen, grunting under his breath.

Out of the corner of his eye he doesn't miss Mike tug at El as they rise from the couch and he pulls her towards her room. He freezes in his movements, his eyes catch the young boys. Hopper growls and stares at him.

Instead of saying anything, the kid gives him a look that says, 'please...trust me', before he pulls El into the room, the door staying open.

Since the cabin is dark, except for the twinkling Christmas tree and the two dull lamps that are lit about the cabin, he can barely make out the two figures in El's room that are now sitting on the bed next to each other.

He can't hear a word their saying, but Mike moves and pulls something from his pocket and hands it to El. She gives him a look, and he nods at the gift, smiling gently.

She undoes the tie and opens the box. He can barely see her gasp through the darkness as she pokes at the item in the box.

'Must be some type of jewelry', his brain says, as he continues to watch as Mike takes the item from her, gestures for her to turn, as he moves his arms around her head, and fiddles with something behind her neck.

Once he's done, his hand moves back into his lap, and El turns to face him, she looks down just enough to look at the necklace as she moves forward, stopping slightly when Mike says something to her, only for her to shake her head and wrap her arms around his neck, as they embrace.

Hopper sighs, not really sure as to how he feels about just watching the intimate moment between his daughter and boyfriend. It seems the boy had a lot planned out for her, and seemed to have wanted to make tonight special.

He eventually turns his attention away from the room as the two exit her room, hand in hand, light blushes adorning their faces as they sit on the couch together.

His inner dad beast growls lowly, knowing that things were okay for now, but he didn't know how long he would be able to keep the beast under control.

When nine o'clock struck within the Hopper household, the older man finally spoke up, "Okay kids, it's late, I've got to get you home".

Residual groans of displeasure are heard all around, which makes Hopper roll his eyes. "Come on Hop, we don't have school tomorrow, why can't we stay over?" Dustin voice perks up, and the kids all excitedly agree.

'No!', bellows through Hopper's head as he is put on the spot. He was

barely ready to have them all come over, let alone stay the night. His eyes flicker to Mike and El on the couch, El is giving him hopeful, pleading eyes, but the fact of her boyfriend staying over, that doesn't sound like the best plan to him.

He groans, "No kids, not this time" comes out of his mouth slowly, and the kids sigh again. "Why not?" this time Mike's voice trails over the kids, and now all of their young eyes are on him, waiting for an answer.

Hopper gives the kid a stare. If he's honest with himself, if they all stayed, he wouldn't really care, he'd just make sure some ground rules were put into place, but, the problem was he hadn't come up with a cover story as to how El even came into his life just yet, and he knew it needed to be done sooner rather than later.

But, he was also tired, he wasn't used to having kids around, let alone six of them at once. This was something that would have to be gradual.

"Look, kids, I think it would be a little weird if the chief of police were to call all your parents and tell them they were staying over" he gives them all a look. "It'll be different once I get a cover story for El, then *maybe* we can discuss having you kids over".

The kids look disappointed still, but they shrug their shoulders in understanding as they each gradually get to their feet and move about the cabin collecting their stuff.

It's a lot later than Hopper expected it to be, and he doesn't want the kids to have to trudge through the forest in the dark and on the streets, so, he ushers them into his awaiting cruiser.

He turns his head, and sees that a sad look has fallen upon El's face as she watches her friends pick up their things and head to the door.

He sighs, knowing he shouldn't be *that* mean and leave the girl alone, it is Christmas after all. He nods to the girl, "Come on El, pile in with your friends" he sighs, and almost immediately the girl perks up with a bright smile as she rushes to the door with her friends, puts on her coat and shoes and grabs onto Mike's nearby hand as they all

disappear out the door.

Max, Dustin, Lucas and Will cram into the very small backseat, while Mike and El cozy up together in the front seat. Hopper wants to roll his eyes, but he refrains from doing so.

He begins the drive to Will's house first since it is the closest to them. The kids, hopped up on sugar continue to lively chat with one another.

As Hopper drops each kid off one by one, El leans forward to each of them, including Max, and gives them each a tight hug, thanking them for coming over for Christmas, and for the gifts she received.

Finally, they pull up to Mike's home, the last one still in the car, who, with El moved to the back seat of the car two houses ago.

For Hopper, it's almost like dejavu, the night after the gate was finally closed. He flicks his eyes to the rearview mirror and can see the two of them have their heads rested up against one another as they sit in silence, just enjoying this moment together.

When Hopper pulls up to the very neat and clean Wheeler residence he turns to the back seat, "Alright kid, time to say goodnight". El heaves a heavy sigh as she nods her head, watching as Mike maneuvers out of the car.

El follows him like a lost puppy as they both stand outside the door, Mike peaks his head back in, "Thanks Hopper...for having us over". This surprises the chief a bit, but he takes it and nods back to him, "Anytime kid, merry Christmas". "Merry Christmas" Mike returns as he shuts the back door, leaving he and El alone outside of the vehicle.

Hopper knew that El wouldn't even have asked to be able to escort Mike to his door like she had last time, so, with his teeth clenched he turned and watched them move towards the door.

Their hands are loosely held between them as they make the walk, and continue to stay together as they chat idly at the doorstep.

He watches as Mike says something, as El subconsciously reaches for the necklace he had gifted her, bowing her head in embarrassment as

he talked.

A few small words are exchanged between them before they stand awkwardly looking at each other. Hopper rolls his eyes, knowing that both are debating the next step, and so is he, as Hopper begins to raise his hand to the horn the second he knows Mike will bend down to El.

And as if on cue, the kid does, ever so slowly, as El stands up on her tiptoes, to meet her very tall boyfriend in the middle. And although the dad beast inside him wants to interrupt this moment, he pulls his hand into a tight grip, turning his head away at the last second, missing the intimate moment between the two teens. As he mentally reminded himself that *'she needs to be a normal kid'* even though it pained him to do so.

He gives them a couple beats before looking back at the door, however, when he does so, his eyes widen in alarm.

For, it's not just them that stand huddled together on the doorstep, but the door to the Wheeler residence is open, and Mike's mother stands in the doorway.

"Oh no" Hopper breathes, just about ready to jump out of the cruiser and do and or say anything to make sure El's cover isn't blown.

But as he watches the scene unfold, he sees that El has reached her hand forward and is shaking it with Mike's mom, who, to his disbelief is smiling brightly at her.

El then turns and points directly to him, Karen looks over the heads of the two teens, her eyes meet Hopper in the night, and she gives him a light smile and wave, which he returns.

El tuns back, says something to Karen and Mike. And with one last look to her boyfriend, she gives his hand a tight squeeze before she jumps down the steps, gives the two one last wave before she approaches the car with a smile.

Hopper can't help but watch each of her movements as she enters the vehicle. She sits and lets out a long breath, timidly looking at the

older man.

He can't hold back anymore, "What the hell happened?!" he asks through a strained whisper. He watches as El blushes lightly, "Uhm...Mike and I were saying goodnight" she shrugs her shoulders, and he knows that the other meaning to this is, '*Mike was giving me a goodnight kiss*', but he lets it go for her to continue, "And...his mom opened the door, she saw us and was surprised".

Hopper holds onto each of her words, "Well, what did she say?" El chuckles lightly, "She, uh, she was surprised, asked who I was, and Mike jumped in and told her that I was the new kid he had told her about. So, I introduced myself and told her that you had adopted me, and you had introduced me to Mike and his friend".

"Did she seem to buy it?" Hopper asks quickly. El shrugs her shoulders, "She was looking at Mike and I kind of weirdly, but...she was really nice and seemed happy to meet me".

Hopper sighs in relief, he hadn't planned on this happening so quickly, but he guess he would need to start introducing El as his daughter and get her back story going so that Karen wouldn't be blabbing all over town the wrong information.

He lets out a long sigh. "Hop...it's okay, I don't think she was mad, she seemed...happy?" she quirks an eyebrow up to him, and he nods in return, giving a slight chuckle, "Yeah, I'm sure Karen was happy to see her nerdy son kissing a sweet girl like you" he jokes, smiling at the girl. And at this El turns away abruptly blushing all the same.

"Daaad" she whines not wanting to face him. He only laughs louder as he turns to rev the cruiser's engine to life.

He pulls out of the Wheeler's driveway and directs the car to their home. He glances out of the corner of his eye to see El fiddling with the necklace around her neck. He hadn't caught a glimpse of it before, but now he can see a small snowflake hangs from her neck.

He smiles, "So, did you have a good Christmas?" he asks the girl. And without turning towards him, he can see the brilliant smile on her face as she answers, "The best".

Yay! I got this chapter done before I head out! I'm sorry to my Stranger Tides and Watching Her Fall In Love fans, but I am heading out on my honeymoon in a couple of days, so I will not be writing for about a week, so I apologize for the wait between chapters! So, I hope this long chapter makes up for the hiatus!

And I can't thank you all enough again for your beautiful comments, kudos and sweet words, it honestly melts my heart! I hope everyone had a wonderful Christmas and has a great New Year!

As always, reviews are wonderful! I will see you next year with some new chapters! Love to you all!

8. The First Visit (Mileven POV)

Alright, so I've got caught up on Stranger Tides, so now I can get another chapter on this up and going. Again, thank you SO MUCH for the wonderful and positive reviews I received on the last chapter, along with the well wishes with our honeymoon, we had a fantastic time!

Also, as I'm sure every fan knows, Stranger Things 3 got a release date! Yay! I'm hoping they give us a trailer during the Super Bowl like they did two years ago!

Anyways, on with this chapter!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Chapter 4: The First Visit (Mileven's POV).

It's as if the air around her is much lighter than it ever has been. She has never felt this way in her entire life. Being locked up in a lab and not knowing the *true* experiences of the world has thrown open the door to so many new things for her, she's sometimes overwhelmed by the newness of it all.

But, there's something linger deep within her heart about tonight that she can't let go, and she wholeheartedly holds onto it.

She's so immersed into the feelings that continue to make her swell with enjoyment that she barely pays attention to the ride home. Her thoughts continue to replay the evening over and over again, as she allows each warm feeling to blanket her in contentment.

El is so far gone into thinking about the night, more so one particular event and person, that she barely notices that they have arrived home. With a smile she's sure is permanently glued to her face, she floats to the front door of the cabin as if her feet were floating on air.

Absentmindedly she flicks her head and unlatches the locks from within the cabin, as she makes her way through the door.

She feels herself take off her coat and drop it to the floor without a

second thought, but the memories of the night continue to play like an endless movie within her head that makes her not want to think about anything else, especially the fact that Hopper should probably be barking at her to pick up her coat. However, if he does say anything to her, she doesn't hear it, as she floats to the couch and flops onto it with a content sigh.

Her eyes focus on the uneven ceiling above her as her thoughts flick back to the moment Mike had asked her to be his girlfriend. She feels her heart tighten in excitement within her chest. She barely notices that the couch sinks slightly when Hopper sits down by her feet.

Only his deep voice penetrates her mind and brings her attention back to him. "So, was it everything you'd thought it would be?" his voice is low. She can't help but let out a dreamy sigh as she sits upright and gives Hopper a beaming smile.

"It was...amazing, and perfect, and....and I can't think of any other way to describe it" she shrugs her shoulders at him as she looks off into the distance, her brain only wanting to be thinking about the last couple hours of her life.

However, Hopper continues to talk to her, "Uh...how was it with your friends...and uhm...Mike?" he drags out. El flicks her eyes quickly to her adoptive father, she feels that he might be trying to pry into something deeper, and she can't help but try to fight the warmth that begins to fill her cheeks as she ducks her head.

"El....did something happen?" his voice is suddenly serious, and she feels the tension sitting in the air around him. She lifts her head, but struggles to meet his eyes.

When she doesn't answer, she hears him let out a tentative, "El", in which immediately causes her to pull her legs up into her chest, as she sighs slightly.

El is contemplating within her mind of whether she should tell Hopper or not about what had occurred in the cafeteria. In that moment with Mike, it felt...different for her, the word *privacy*, trickled through her mind.

She figures that he might not continue to press her for information, for, she feels slightly afraid of what might happen if she tells him about hers and Mike's current decision.

Within her mind, she's decided to just sit silently and hope that he doesn't say anything else. But, then Hopper opens his mouth and he recites to her the words she has used against him *many* times, "El, remember, ' '".

Deep within her gut, she feels her stomach twist, and El knows that he has caught her. So, she finally turns her eyes up to her awaiting father and lets out a long breath, as she pushes her feet to hang off the couch as she fiddles with her fingers slightly. "I know" El whispers, not meeting his eyes.

She struggles to form the words as she fiddles with the smooth ribbon that trails from around her waist she feels Hopper move closer to her as she feels his strong arm wrap around her, giving her comfort, "E, you know you can talk to me, no matter what" he gives her a tight squeeze.

She sighs again, turning her head towards him, "I...just don't want you to be mad" her voice aches with worry as her big eyes search his face. She watches his eyes grow bigger, and she quickly becomes concerned that she has said something not right.

El watches anxiously as his face softens as he chokes out, "Uh...okay El, you've got to let me know, I'm a little worried now" he states honestly.

She nods her head, understanding his words, "It's Mike" she states, and she can't help the smile that creeps back onto her face. As she imagines him under the twinkling lights in the auditorium as they danced to the music around them.

"What about Mike?" his voice sounds strained, but El giggles slightly, "Mike...he took me aside, and brought me to the cafeteria" she starts, as she once agains begins to remember the scene within her mind.

"Yeah", is all Hopper says as he awaits for her to continue.

El nods her head, "He took me to the cafeteria, and brought me to the spot where..." and she trails off, evaluating her next words.

She had learned all about what Mike had first done shortly after Hopper first took her in. Learning the word 'kiss' and watching Hopper get all flustered about it, she wondered if he would do it again as she explained what happened next.

El opens her mouth slightly, waiting for the words to come, before she finally says, "Where...he first kissed me", and now she can feel her face burning at her words, a small smile still tucked gently on her face.

"Wait, the parking lot wasn't your first kiss?" he asks and El hears the confusion in his voice, but now a slight annoyance creeps into her body, she whips her head to him with wide eyes, "You watched!?" she states in a ticked voice as she watches Hopper who is staring at her with a gaping mouth, not sure as to what to say.

"I..uh..." he trails off as El folds her arms over her chest giving him a deep stare, waiting for *him* to explain.

El watches him as he shakes his head and then throws a tight glare in her direction as his voice raises with his next sentence, "You're thirteen El, I'm allowed to know what goes on in your life, especially if it involves *some boy*" he drawls.

At this El can't help but rise to her feet, placing her hands on her hips, now feeling furious, "Mike's not just *some boy*" she repeats, her anger mounting, "And we've kissed a couple times too" she throws in for good measure, as she eyes her father, before she continues on her rant, "That's why Mike pulled me to the cafeteria, he asked me to be his girlfriend...so he's my boyfriend!" her voice is steady and firm as she watches the man before her just gape at her in surprise.

Her eyes follow his movement as Hopper shakes his head and rises to his own feet now towering above her, but she doesn't feel afraid. "Boyfriend!?" he shouts down to her, and she gives him a tight nod. "Yes, Mike asked me to be his girlfriend, and I said 'yes'".

His eyes tighten, as they stare at one another "El, you're both

thirteen, you haven't seen each other for a year, besides, what do you even *know* about a relationship?" he questions her.

She looks up at him and she feels herself softening. Hopper doesn't know the hours she's spent pouring over the dictionary he bestowed upon her, looking up words she's never heard or understood. This happened more so when she was watching her daily soaps.

Her heart would always swell watching the man and woman on the television confess their love for one another. As tears would silently escape her eyes as she held tightly to her teddy bear, silently wishing that was her and Mike. She learned a lot about relationships through these numerous shows.

So, El looks up to her dad and recites exactly what a relationship meant to her, "A relationship is between two people who care deeply about each other....Mike...Mike has been there, he's waited, *I* waited" she points to her chest. "We both hurt when we are apart, we both want to be near one another...it's...it's unexplainable" her eyes well up with emotions, hoping that Hopper understands the truth behind her and Mike's attraction towards one another.

El can feel the wet tears welling within her eyes as she watches the tall man before her take in her words. She watches as his shoulders fall slightly as he lets out a long breath, as he moves to sit on the couch, she gazes upon him as he rubs an anxious hand through his thinning hair.

He takes in a deep breath, looking up to see she is staring back, he gives her a soft smile as he reaches out and takes her hand. When she feels his warm, rough hands take her small smooth one, she feels the emotion behind the gesture, and she lightens too.

Their eyes meet, "El...I'm sorry...it's just *a lot* to take in, to understand" Hopper starts slowly, squeezing her hand, "I know that there's something between you and Mike that's different than other relationships by any means, and...to be honest...I knew this talk would be coming, but I just hoped it was later" he cracks her a smile, and she can't help but return

"This...it's just going to be a lot to take in is all" he shrugs his

shoulders. "I mean, first I adopt a teenage telekinetic daughter, and barely a day later she's got a boyfriend".

El feels the giggles build within her, as she continues to listen to Hopper, "Look, El, I know there's nothing I can say or do to maybe persuade you to wait a bit to start dating, but I know that's not going to happen" he states, while El nods lightly.

"I...it's going to take a bit to get used to is all, and...there are things we'll have to talk about down the road" he gives her a look, in which El furrows her eyebrows at. She doesn't know what he's talking about.

She decides to voice her confusion, "What other things?" she asks, and she watches as Hopper freezes in the moment, as she patiently awaits for him to continue speaking, hoping he answers her question.

He looks back at her as if she has just asked the most difficult question in the world, and she feels lost for a moment, as she patiently awaits for him to continue.

He finally lets out a long sigh, she feels him squeeze her hand once again as he speaks, "Like I said, we'll talk about it down the road, when the situation arises" he finishes, giving her a look of pleading, hoping she understands.

El ponders his statement, still curious about what *the other things*, are, because being locked in a lab and held away from the world has her mind constantly questioning and thinking all of these new things around her.

However, the look on Hopper's face doesn't show anger, or hurt, she actually can't put her finger on the look he is giving her, but it seems as if he's asking her to trust him for now, and that she can live with.

So, she accepts that whatever her new father is talking about, and that they will discuss it when the time comes, she nods her head lightly and says, "Okay", she watches as Hopper sags in his seat and lets out a heavy breath, it kind of makes her smile.

Her eyes follow Hopper as he stands to his feet and rubs the her hair affectionately, the contact is usually okay with El, however, her hair

has never been so tame and the way Mike commented on it makes her feel extraordinarily special. The second Hopper's hand makes slight contact with her hair she backs off quickly as she cries, "Ah, dad!", and then giving him a tight look, "You're going to ruin it" she frowns up to him.

He chuckles to the her, "Hate to break it to you kid, but it's going to go back to it's regular curls once you take a shower" he shrugs. Her eyes widen at this realization. She thought with the curling thing Nancy had used to tame her wild curls would be permanent, she didn't realize they would go away.

She reaches up to her hair and whispers, "Nooo". She watches Hopper roll his eyes, "Don't worry kid, as it grows out, it probably won't be that curly anyways, and....I can try to help you keep it tame, I'll ask Nancy what she did", he tries to soothe her.

El feels her excitement grow within her at the realization that this could be done once again, she can't help but launch herself into her new fathers arms, "Thank you!" she cries into his chest and he chuckles in return, "Anything for you kid" he sighs as he returns the hug. And, in her new fathers arms, she feels safe and relaxed as she takes a moment to take the feeling in.

After the snowball, El and Mike have daily conversations with one another via their supercoms. Their conversations grow more in depth each day. El can't help but eagerly ask about school and the things that go on there.

Although for Mike it's nothing special, for El, it again is another new experience that she wants to understand and get as much exposure to as she can.

And she's very thankful to Mike who, although she can tell doesn't *just* want to talk about school, answers every single one of her questions. To El, Mike is able to paint an elaborate picture of what a typical school day looks like, and the more he talks, the more she grows eager to be able to join he and the rest of their friends hopefully soon.

This is how the majority of their conversations go, El asking about Mike's day, and vice versa. El, sadly feels as if she doesn't have much to talk about being cooped up in the cabin all day watching her soaps or reading books. But, somehow Mike is able to make her boring day sound exciting, and she secretly loves that he does this for her.

However, one day during the start of the week, 'Monday', her calendar reads, she is sitting eating her normal eggo waffle breakfast, at their rickety coffee table, as Hopper has already gone off to work, she prepares herself to entertain herself for the day.

She's watching the first soap of the day, absentmindedly chewing on her eggo, when she hears a peculiar noise. She stops her jaw from moving for a second as her eyes flick around the cabin, trying to determine where the noise is coming from.

And suddenly, the noise becomes familiar, it's the same noise her supercom makes when Mike is trying to reach her. So, she sets her half finished eggo on the plate that sits on the coffee table, rises to her feet, and makes her way into her bedroom.

As she enters her room, her ears prick as the familiar noise continues to filter into her room, although to her ears it sounds rather muffled, she moves to her bedside, where she left her supercom tucked close to her pillow.

"El?" she can just barely make out her crackling supercom that hides under her pillow. She furrows her brows in confusion as she moves to pick up her supercom.

She stares at the device for a moment, waiting for it to come alive once again, just to make sure she's not just hearing things.

A moment later it crackles to life once again, "El...are you there?", and El feels her heart jump in her chest as she recognizes Mike's voice trailing through. She eagerly pushes her supercoms button down as she moves it closer to her lips to speak, "Mike, what are you doing calling?"

She lets go of the button and waits for Mike to answer her question. "Oh, good you did hear me!" is Mike's first line over the device,

"Yeah, I thought it would cool to call you, we're on school vacation", he answers her question.

"School vacation?" she chirps back into the supercom. She knows what school and vacation is, but has never heard of them together. She waits as she listens to Mike chuckle through the device, "Yeah, it means we have some time off from school, like...instead of going to school during the week, we actually get to stay home!" his voice is excited, which in turn makes El excited too.

"So, you get to be home...like me?" she attempts to clarify. "Exactly, we don't have to worry about going to school for like ten days, it's awesome!"

El smiles at her boyfriend's enthusiasm, however, another question pops into her mind, "Why isn't there school?" she asks.

Mike's voice trickles through the device, "Oh, because it's Christmas break" he states as if it's the most normal thing in the world.

But, El hasn't exactly come to understand what this 'Christmas' word is. Within the last couple of weeks she's seen the colorful flashing commercials that have advertised this 'Christmas' however, she does not know the word, but she knows the perfect person to ask.

"Mike?" her voice is timid going through the device. "Yes, El?" Mike questions.

She fiddles with her device before she speaks, "What's....what's Christmas?" she asks the boy she can ask anything.

"Oh!" Mike's voice comes as a surprise, which startles El slightly. "You haven't heard of Christmas?" he strains slightly.

El shakes her head to herself before she whispers a sad, "No" through the device. It's silent between the devices for a bit, before Mike answers, "El, it's okay that you don't know, and I'm more than happy to explain it all to you" his voice is chipper, which brightens El and brings a soft smile to her face.

"I'd like that" she says through the device. And moments later Mike's voice rings through her small room for the next couple of hours as

Mike explains every little detail to her about Christmas.

Throughout his explanation, El grows more and more excited about the new holiday she has just learned about. She jumps in here and there to ask questions, which Mike more than eagerly answers before jumping right back into to where he left off.

She finds herself totally enraptured by the details. From learning about santa and his reindeer, although, Mike does elude that he is a made up character, she still loves the magic behind it.

While she's listening to Mike's every explanation, she allows herself to close her eyes and imagine exactly what it would be like if the cabin was covered in the bright colored lights, Mike talks about, along with all the jolly decorations.

She can't help but sigh into the device as Mike begins to talk about the tradition of bringing a Christmas tree into the home. "You okay, El?" Mike's voice shakes El out of her imagination.

"Oh!" she chirps through the device, not realizing that she's probably not said much since she's all been but in her wild imagination.

"Just...thinking about it all, it would be wonderful to have a tree" she sighs to Mike, who chuckles through the device, "You should ask Hopper, I'd bet he'd get one for you, since it is your first Christmas and all".

El hums to herself. She thinks back to the many things she has asked Hopper about, and he seems to just grumble about it. "I don't know, Mike", she states through the device wistfully.

"Just ask, there's no harm in that" Mike tries to keep his voice animated. And through the device she hears another voice coming through. She listens as Mike sighs, "Hey El, that's my mom calling me to help with dinner, I'll talk to you later alright?"

El flicks her eyes over to the clock that sits on her wall, she can see it reads five o'clock and her eyes widen. "We've been talking, a lot" she giggles into the device, and she hears Mike return her chuckle, "Yeah, time flies when you're talking to your girlfriend".

El can feel her cheeks catch fire at the mention of her status of being Mike's girlfriend, the smile that stretches across her face is sure to never fade.

"You kept me very entertained, your a great boyfriend Mike" she returns. She hears Mike's breath catch through her device and she's pretty sure he's probably sharing the same blush she is. "Heh, thanks El, it's been great talking to you all day", he all but sighs.

She giggles once again, "You made my day better too" she coos. "Well, I better go before my mom calls for me again" he says sadly.

El hums sadly too, "Okay, talk to you later Mike....bye" she tries to say a bit more cheerfully. "Bye, El" Mike's soft voice returns, and soon, there is nothing but static between the two of them.

El lets out a long breath, hating to have to end her conversation with Mike, wishing more so to be able to see him. But, their conversation about Christmas stirs excitement with her, and she is determined to talk to Hopper when he arrives home.

However, by the time Hopper does arrive home, she somewhat loses her nerve, for she is afraid of the possible 'no' that might come from Hopper's mouth when she asks him about celebrating Christmas.

So, when Hopper arrives home, she bottles up her emotions and decides to mope instead. However, this doesn't work either, because she realizes quickly that her new dad can read her like an open book.

When she opens up and begins to tell her adopted father about the newfound holiday and how she so desperately wants to celebrate the holiday like the rest of her friends, she's quite surprised by his initial reaction, as they pick at their breakfast.

"You really want to celebrate Christmas?" Hopper's light eyes meet her dark ones, and she begins to feel her heart pound within her chest in eagerness.

She then jumps to her feet, Hopper's eyes following her movements, "Yes! With a tree and everything!" El cheers as she claps her hands

together.

El watches the man as he gives her a bright smile "Alright kid, I'll get you a tree, and we'll decorate it, okay?"

She can't stop as she begins to jump up and down, "Can you make sure it's a big one!" her eyes gleam up at him. He chuckles down at her, "I'll try to do the best I can" he smiles to her, and she realizes that she needs to inform Mike immediately of the good news.

So, she hurries past Hopper and runs directly into her room, dives onto her bed, and fishes for her supercom.

She presses down on the contact button and yells into the device, "Mike, come in Mike!". El waits patiently for her device to static to life, and it finally does, "Hey, El, what's up?" his voice sounds somewhat strained, but El can't hold back her joy as she practically yells into the device, "Hopper's getting us a tree!"

"What, really he said yes?!" Mike's voice sounds just as excited as hers. "Yes! He says it's going to be a big one too!" she exclaims.

She hears Mike laugh through the device, "That's awesome El! Wait until you decorate it!"

"I know, I can't wait!" she cries into her supercom, as she and Mike fall into their usual conversation, however, El continually brings it back to Christmas.

"Tell me about the presents and santa again", she sighs dreamily into the device. Mike hesitates to respond, and when he does, his voice sounds a bit more drained than it usually does, "Heh, El, I've told you like...five times" he jokes lightly. And El can somewhat guess that she thinks Mike is just about sick of telling her about santa over and over again.

"I know, sorry, just...excited is all" she sighs, and then Mike's voice just about jumps out of the device, "No, no, I'm sorry El, I didn't mean for it to come out like that, I can tell you again", his voice is now full of worry. And El can't help but smile because she knows Mike can't stand it if it seems like he has hurt her in anyway.

She silently shakes her head to herself with a small smile etched across her face, "It's okay Mike, I have heard it quite a bit".

El listens as Mike's sigh can be heard before her answers, "It really is no problem though".

"Mike" she states soft, but firmly, "It's okay, I understand". It takes him another second to answer before his voice comes through, "Okay, but, if you ask...I will tell you" he states.

El smiles at this, "Sounds good" she chirps, but then her smile falls slightly from her face. "I...I wish I could see you on Christmas" her voice is quiet.

"I know, I wish I could too, El" Mike's voice sounds sad too. "But, I promise we will get to see each other soon, okay?"

El smiles at his enthusiasm, and she can't help but smile as she says, "Promise?" through the device, as Mike's small chuckle rings through before he replies with "Promise".

And once their conversation has concluded for the night, El falls asleep looking up at the rafters in her room, smiling to herself, wishing deep within her heart that she would be able to see a certain someone on a particular holiday.

El has a difficult time staying still the entire day she is cooped up in the cabin, knowing that Hopper would be bringing home the said Christmas tree this evening, and she couldn't wait to decorate it.

She spends the day talking on and off with Mike, which helps the day pass by a little quicker. But, when the late afternoon rolls around and their group of friends arrive to Mike's house to play his newest Dungeons and Dragons campaign, he begrudgingly signs off.

However, all of her friends firstly surround Mike's supercom and yell 'hellos' through the device, which makes El very happy being able to listen to her friends.

"I'll talk to you later, alright El? Hope you have fun decorating your Christmas tree" Mike's voice is soft and full of longing. El sighs, "I

will, have fun with everyone" she tries to hold back her disappointment in not being able to be there with the rest of their friends.

"We will...see you later, El" Mike whispers in which El returns with a sad "See you later", and the line goes dead between them.

El huffs as she plops herself down onto the couch, sighing heavily, as she has to continue to wait for Hopper to return home.

To her surprise though, no sooner does she hang-up from talking to Mike, does she hear the secret knock on the door. El's eyes light up in excitement as she flings the locks open as fast as she can to allow Hopper in.

The door squeaks open on it's old rusty hinges. And El is met with a large green mass. Her eyes widen taking in the tree as Hopper drags it into the living room.

When Hopper is finally through the door, El is met with a new smell. It's sweet and fresh, so she decides to take a deep inhale as Hopper fumbles with the tree.

"What do you think kid?" he asks her as he holds it away from himself. She can't help but marvel at the new sight, "It's perfect", is all she says as Hopper smiles and begins to get the tree set up in the corner of the living room.

El comes to believe that the next hour is probably her most favorite so far spent within the cabin. After Hopper got the tree arranged in a new tree stand, he placed a box full of unique balls and trinkets in front of her.

"We'll have to put the lights on first, then we can decorate" he explains as El begins to rummage through the boxes, marveling at the variety of beautiful colors and unique designs of the ornaments before her.

She can't help but laugh as she watches Hopper untangle a set of new lights and grumbles about this being his least favorite part about setting up a tree. But, he gets it accomplished, plugs in the lights, and

El is immediately mesmerized by the newly twinkling tree.

She then quickly dives into the boxes of ornaments and begins to hang them here and there, covering the whole tree, making it look even more beautiful in her book.

As the night drags on, and the tree stands finished, El can't bare to take her eyes away from the new sight, and she eagerly asks Hopper if it's okay for her to sleep on the couch for the night.

He agrees to the question with ease, and El feels herself at peace with the whole moment, as her eyes begin to heavy, the lights from the trees blurring, as she falls asleep.

He can't help but shake the words she had said to him the other night, "*I...I wish I could see you on Christmas*", echoes through his mind again and again throughout the next day.

It eventually almost drives him crazy enough to pull his hair out, but he manages to resist the urge. The persistent thought must be showing as his friends have noticed his lackluster and distractedness during their campaign.

"Mike, come on snap out of it man!" Dustin's voice brings him back to the table they are all sitting around.

Mike blinks a couple of times, and looks around the table, seeing that Dustin, Lucas, Will, and even Max are giving him either weird or concerned looks.

"Uh.." is all Mike was able to stammer out before all of his friends roll their eyes at him and let out exasperated sighs.

"Dude, where's your head at!?" Lucas complains from across the table, and now it's Mike's turn to roll his eyes, "Nothing! I was just waiting for you all to make a decision!" he attempts to argue.

Max shakes her head, causing her mane of red hair to move around wildly, "We made a decision like two minutes ago and we've been trying to get a reaction from you, but you were in some other world".

Mike lets out a huff or breath, before falling back into his seat and muttering a "Whatever" to his friends as he looks down at his notes.

"Tch, it's obvious he's thinking about his *girlfriend!*" Dustin singsongs and now the others are joining and laughing.

"Oooh, are you thinking about *kissing!*" Lucas jumps up out of his seat, and begins to make kissing noises in his direction, making the others laugh.

Mike can feel his cheeks flaring, however, he's not sure if it's to do with embarrassment or with the fact that his so called 'friends' are ticking him off.

They continue to throw out jokes about his and El's relationship, his face darkening with each prod, when finally, Mike hits his limit, and smashes his fist down as hard as he can against the rickety table.

The figurines and dice jostle across the table, tumbling this way and that, as the fragile table threatens to collapse. His friends freeze with wide eyes on him.

Mike can't help but shoot daggers at them, "Knock it off! It's none of any of your business as to what El and I do! I'm sorry I was thinking about how we won't be able to see each other for Christmas, and it's something that she really wanted!" he all but yells to his friends.

He continues to silently seethe as his friends cast careful glances between one another, not sure if anyone should speak or not.

Mike wants to keep yelling at his friends, because they honestly don't get the situation that he and El are in, and it frustrates him to no end that they have no sympathy towards their relationship.

However, there's a gentle touch on Mike's shoulder, and he whips his head around to see Will is reaching out to him, giving him a soft look. And, just like that, Mike feels his anger dampen as he feels his body relax slightly.

"Sorry Mike, we didn't know", is all he says, and Mike lets out a long breath, "I'm sorry too, it's just...it's hard" he whispers as he looks down to the table, his eyes scanning his scattered papers.

He then slowly turns his head up to look at the others, "We only get to talk over the supercom, and...we haven't seen each other since the snowball...I..." he stops short not really wanting to confess all of his feelings to his friends.

"We miss her too" Max perks up from across the table and Mike's eyes flick to hers. She offers him a soft smile, "Come on Romeo, why can't we see El on Christmas?"

Mike huffs, "You know why, it's Hopper" he grumbles as he settles back down into his chair, folding his growing arms across his chest.

"Mike, you got him to agree to the snowball, why not Christmas?" Dustin shrugs his shoulders.

"Yeah, I mean, what's he going to do, keep her locked in the cabin forever?" Lucas quips.

Mike shrugs his shoulders, "I don't know, but I do know that he's just difficult to reason with".

"Why not talk to him again? Just ask if we can come over in the evening, I mean...our parents always get together, we'll just tell them that there's a new kid in town, we met them, they have no one new to play with for Christmas and we're going to hang out with them", Will offers.

Mike looks at Will with an incredulous look, "Do you think our parents would buy that?"

Will shrugs, "I mean, I'm sure if we talked to my mom, she'd follow along, she knows about El" he points out.

And it sits in his brain for awhile as he mulls over Will's suggestion in his head. "It doesn't hurt to ask" Dustin shrugs.

Mike nods his head, making his decision, "Okay...I'll go talk to Hopper at the station again, you're right, it doesn't hurt to ask" he says as he gives each of his friends a broad smile, in which they return.

The party quickly finishes their game of Dungeons and Dragons, so that they give Mike ample amount of time to make it to the police station before it gets to late.

They each bid Mike good luck as they all grab ahold of their bikes, and Max her skateboard, as they each make their way home.

Mike waves to his friends as they disappear down the street. He grips onto his bike's handlebars tightly as he lets out a quick breath as he pushes off from the ground, steadies himself and makes his way to the police station.

Arriving at the station, the familiar smell of stale cigarettes and old coffee hits his nose the moment he walks in. He can't help but scrunch his nose slightly, not enjoying the scent, as he approaches the familiar front desk lady.

She sits tucked up tight to her own computer as she clicks away at her keyboard, she doesn't even give Mike a look as she asks, "Yes?"

Mike fumbles slightly with his words, "Uh..um..is Chief Hopper here?" his voice is a bit scratchy, dry from nerves once again.

At his question the lady stops, looks up over her large glasses and gives Mike a look, but then she smiles softly, "Ah, here to see the Chief again, Mr. Wheeler?"

As if she knows what his intentions are, Mike feels a slight wave of panic wash over him, *'had Hopper told everyone about El yet?'* Races through his mind.

"Um, yes, just have a small matter to talk to him about is all" he tries to sound nonchalant, but he's pretty sure he's failing miserably.

The lady gives a quick nod as she stands from her seat and opens the half swinging door into the office, "He's at his desk now, just give it a quick knock" she smiles to him, as Mike gives a small nod, walking through the opening to the office.

Mike's eyes flick to the Chief's door, and he takes in a long shaky breath before he approaches the door.

His right hand grasps the cool handle of the door, while his left one moves to give a slow knock, just as he opens the door.

"Uh...Hopper?" he calls out into the room, his dark eyes falling on the male in question, who, it seems to Mike was just about to drift off to sleep, for he jostles slightly in his seat, blinking his tired eyes in his direction.

Mike shuts the door behind him as he approaches Hopper desk. Mike doesn't miss the tight stare that the older man gives him as he growls, "Wheeler", at him as he attempts to rub the sleep away from his eyes.

Mike swallows tightly as he moves to sit in the spare chair that sits opposite of Hopper. He sits slowly, leaning back in the chair, and before he gets to speak Hopper does so first, "What are you here for, kid?" he questions. Mike moves his lips hesitantly, and decides to not start directly on the subject he wants to broach, but instead lead his way into it, "El told me that you guys got a tree...that you guys are celebrating Christmas?"

Hopper quirks an eyebrow up at him, "What of it?" Mike clears his throat, he can sense the tension that Hopper is throwing his way.

He decides then, it's probably better to just broach the subject, bring it up quickly like taking off a bandaid, "Uh...well I was just curious if...if the party and I could stop over...Christmas day?" he raises his hand to move a stray piece of his long hair from his eyes.

Hopper glares at him, and Mike feels as if he's trying to stare him to death, before Hopper begins to speak, "Look, it's her first Christmas, I figured we could celebrate it toge-"

But before Hopper can finish, Mike jumps in, "Exactly! So, we should be able to see her too!" his voice begins to rise.

The older man crinkles his eyes together even more so, "Watch your tone, Wheeler" he bites, and Mike tries to settle himself, as he scoots back into the chair, he sighs heavily, "Look, we've all got her something small to give her, and...we just wanted to give her gifts to her in person. Not just that, but we thought we could do the traditional Christmas things with her too", he adds on.

He's actually not even sure if the rest of the party has gotten her a gift. He just figured this might help out their case if he told Hopper they had something to give her. In truth, he had picked out something special, especially since this was her first Christmas, and it was also their first one together too, and he wanted her to remember it always.

Hopper's deep voice brings him back as he asks, "Traditional Christmas things? What's that mean?"

A small smile tugs at Mike's face, "You know, like, baking cookies, telling Christmas stories, playing games...stuff like that".

Mike watches as Hopper leans forward in his chair, "What about your family, won't they be missing you kids?" he argues, but Mike already has this planned thanks to Will, a smile grows on his face, "Oh, we all do Christmas in the morning, and our parents always get together for drinks at the end of the night, and we just end up in the basement anyways" he starts. "And, I already told my mom that there was a new kid that we had met, and had no friends to spend Christmas with, and she said it was fine for us to go", he gives Hopper a winning smile.

Actually, the last part wasn't *entirely* true, because he had yet to tell his mom about El, but he planned on doing so tonight, he figured he'd best wait until he got an answer from Hopper first.

"You told her about El?" his voice strains lightly. Mike shakes his head quickly, "I never told my mom who she was, or that she was even a girl, I figured you'd come up with some story anyways, I mean...you did adopt her" he shrugs his shoulders.

Mike watches in anticipation as Hopper lets out a long breath, and then he rubs at his forehead, as he awaits an answer.

He removes his hand from his brow and huffs. "Alright, look, if you kids want to come over, *after*, you've finished your stuff with your family, I guess it wouldn't harm anything for you guys to come over".

Hopper's words pierce through Mike quickly, and the excitement within him grows as he jumps to his feet at his words, "Thanks

Hopper I-!", but Hopper holds up his hand to stop him. "But, you need to come in groups, at different times, and you'll leave at different times to, got it?" he gives Mike a stern look.

Mike falters slightly, but, he eventually nods in return, "Okay, that's fair I guess, thanks Hop", he finishes as he stands and moves around the chair to leave.

However, Hopper stops him, "Wheel-Mike, wait a second" he calls out to him, and Mike stops in his steps, slightly afraid to turn around, thinking Hopper has changed his mind. However, he does turn, both of the males eyes meeting.

It startles him slightly when Hopper gives him a small grin, "Just wanted to say...El told me something interesting the other day", he states. Mike furrows his brows in confusion, wondering what El had talked to him about "Oh?" he quips, his attention on the older man.

Hopper nods slowly coming to stand in front of him, Mike feels as if he's being intimidated and attempts to stand his ground as Hopper continues to speak, "Yeah, she uh...well she told me you asked her something at the end of the dance there".

Mike's eyes grow wide, now knowing *exactly* what El must have told him, and he's pretty sure in this moment the Chief of police is going to pummel him. So, he turns away slightly from the older man, and only whispers a small, "Oh".

"Oh is right, kid, I knew you and El were close, but...this whole-" and he gestures wildly between Mike and to the distance before he spits out, "*Thing*, between the two of you, there needs to be a discussion".

Mike feels slightly annoyed at his statement, honestly, in his own mind, Hopper has no business in controlling what happens between he and El, for Hopper's the one who kept them apart for almost a year, he has no right to say anything.

Mike whips his head up to the older man and squints at him, ready to defend his and El's relationship, "It's not just some 'thing' that's going on between El and I, we're in a relationship with each other" his words are firm.

Hopper scoffs at him, and that ticks him off even more, "Yeah, like you two know much about being in a relationship", he throws at the him, and Mike begins to feel the rage taking over.

He watches through red eyes as El's adopted father moves away from him to stand behind his desk. But, Mike doesn't let him go far as he stands before him, "You just have a problem with the fact that El *likes* me, and I like her too, and....and we want to be together" he growls.

Hopper fixes him with a look, "It seems interesting that you seem to think this is something you can actually start with someone like El", his words cut through Mike like a knife, and he glares at the man.

"What do you mean by that! Just because El has...powers-" Mike lowers his voice at the last word, "Doesn't mean she isn't a normal girl, with normal feelings!" he bites back to the older man.

Hopper opens his mouth to speak, but Mike cuts through before he can utter a noise, "And that's not fair! You labeling her as this...this helpless person, El is still learning, I get that, but for you to just assume she doesn't know anything about being in a relationship with someone, that's bullshit!" he throws to him. Because Mike *knows* El, maybe not every little thing, but he knows that there is something between them, he's known it since the day he first heard her laugh in his dad's lazy boy.

Of course, not knowing where she was for a year hurt him more than anyone could ever know, not knowing how she truly felt about him. But, just a month and a half ago, when they were reunited, and they only had eyes for each other, he knew in that moment, that she felt exactly the same as he did.

Mike watches as Hopper gets to his feet as he leans over the desk, their eyes glaring daggers at one another, "That's my point kid, she doesn't actually know what it's like to actually *be* with someone romantically, just what she's seen on t.v!" he barks back.

"That doesn't mean she's not human! That she doesn't feel emotions! And obviously if she didn't feel *something* for me, she wouldn't have been reaching out to me for three hundred and fifty three days!" Mike growls, his spitting flying from his mouth, making Hopper back off

slightly.

"We have our opportunity now, *you* kept us apart, but...there's always been something there between the two of us, from the moment I took her in from the rain, ." he slows his voice and enunciated each of his words. Because yes, even back on the day he, Dustin and Lucas found El in the rain, it was him who was most drawn to the girl.

Seeing her with a shaved head, in just a t-shirt, standing in the freezing rain, it broke his heart when their dark eyes met. He remembers it took him all but two seconds for him to rip off his rain jacket and drape it over the poor girl.

He remembers when she flinched at first at the initial contact, but the small warmth she felt from the jacket made her eyes flick up to his. And he remembers giving her an earnest smile, trying to make her feel safe and comfortable, and when she returned his small smile he knew from that night on, that there was something between them.

Mike continues to stare at Hopper, he feels all the emotions he's pent up over the last year beginning to bubble within his chest, "You have no idea...no idea what it felt like....to not know if she was dead...or alive" his voice warbles with emotion.

"But, I knew....I knew deep down that she was okay, and I would have waited forever to know that she was okay" a stray tear leaves Mike's eyes as he shakes his head slightly.

And, Mike desperately hopes that Hopper sees just how much this girl means to him. To Mike, she isn't just some ordinary girl, she's someone who changed his life, and he wanted to be there through everything together.

He attempts to catch his breath, biting back the tears that want to flow, attempting to remain strong. He watches as Hopper backs off slightly as he takes in a long deep breath, his eyes flicking to Mike's.

"Alright, I get it, Mike, I know you and El care about each other, and I know there's nothing I can do to stop any of this from happening" he shrugs his shoulders.

But then he takes a step forward and points a finger to the boy, "What matters, is that if you *ever* hurt her, if you *ever* do something to her that she doesn't want, your throat will be mine kid" he growls lowly.

And, it all hits Mike in one fell swoop as to why Hopper is so hesitant in letting them see one another, so he softens slightly, before he says, "You're afraid", to the older man, who gives him a quick look, "What do you mean?" he growls.

Mike knows *exactly* what freaks Hopper out, especially with the fact that he and El are in a relationship. All Hopper sees in him is a teenage boy who only has one thing on his mind, and that's 'how fast can he get El into bed'. However, Hopper has no idea how much El means to him. That sex, it's the absolute last thing on his mind when it comes to El.

Of course, he finds her beautiful and attractive, but, he knows she doesn't understand some things in this world, and to him, that's okay. It's not like he wants their relationship to go lightning fast like some kids in his grade like to think how a relationship is supposed to be.

To him, all he cares about is spending time with the girl who stole his heart, to get to know everything about her. Yes, a kiss here and there, he won't frown upon, but what Hopper is thinking is a ways down the road.

Mike shakes his head and laughs lightly, "You're afraid I'm going to do something to El, that I'm a hormonal teenage boy, who won't be able to keep his hands off of your daughter".

Hopper whips his head so quickly to Mike, he's pretty sure the older man might've gotten whiplash, but the reaction is all Mike needs to nail his point, so he lets out a breathy laugh, pointing a knowing finger at the older man, "That's what it is, you think I'm going to sleep with her or something the moment we are alone", his voice is full of realization.

"Now, hold on there-" Hopper goes to speak, but Mike cuts him off again, "No, I'll tell you chief", and his voice is deep and determined, his dark eyes meeting the older mans light ones. "I'll *never* do

anything to El, I won't push her to do anything, unless she is sure and she is ready". Mike knows he's pushing it a bit, but he knows deep down in his heart, that if he's lucky, he will do anything to make sure he and El would remain together, if that's what she wanted too.

Mike knows his last statement is a bit bold, so he holds up his hand in defense, "I'm not saying that stuff is going to happen", he starts, and Hopper tilts his head to the boy, as if he isn't believing a word he's spewing, "But...I'm also not going to say it *isn't* going to happen, what I'm telling you is that as long as I'm with El, it'll be all on her, and I want her to understand all that stuff too, and not just through me and my friends", he shrugs his shoulders.

"Besides, Hop, come on, we're fourteen, I know I'm not ready for any of *that* stuff yet" he contorts his face slightly, and he sees Hopper relax his shoulders before he bellows, "Yeah, that's my fear, *you're fourteen!*" he stresses.

Mike scoffs, "Yeah, and just because you might have been like that when you were a kid, doesn't mean I'm like that. Besides...right now, if I get a moment to just sit and talk with El, that's all that matters to me" he says quietly, his eyes searching Hopper's.

And honestly, that *is* all he wants. Just being in the same room with one another makes his heart sing, it makes him feel safe, knowing that she's right there with him, and she's not going anywhere.

"A whole year we went without seeing each other, just being near her, knowing she's alive, that makes my entire day" he sighs with a soft smile.

Mike watches as his words sink into Hopper, and finally, the older man heaves a heavy sigh, "Alright kid, I'll believe you *for now*, anyways", and he can't help but fix the teen with a steely glare, which Mike returns.

Mike slumps his shoulders lightly, feeling more relaxed about the situation. However, it seems Hopper wants to get in one more thing before he moves to leave.

"But, if I ever catch you-" he starts to warn before Mike rolls his eyes

in exasperation, "Yeah, yeah, I know, 'slit my throat'" he mocks in Hopper's even deeper voice.

Hopper shakes his head dismissively, "Anyways, one group will arrive at five, the other five thirty, got it?" he gives Mike a look, showing him this time is non-negotiable, and Mike gives him a tight nod in return.

"Fine, I'll let the others know", he states as he heads for the door once again. But, just as he grabs the door handle he stops, a thought turning in his head. El had surprised him at the dance, and it was the best feeling in the world, he wanted to do the same for her, so he turns to Hopper, "Don't tell El", he says quickly and Mike watches as Hopper gives him a confused look, "I want to surprise her" he smiles, erasing the look from Hopper's face, who only rolls his eyes, "Whatever kid, see you Friday", he dismissively ways him off.

"See ya" Mike throws over his shoulder as he finally opens the door and shuts it behind him. And once the barrier is between the two of them, Mike feels the anticipation of the whole situation finally leave him. As he slumps against the door, heaving a sigh in relief, and not believing his actually luck.

A smile dances across his face as he honestly can't believe Hopper has just agreed to all of this. But, then a thought jumps into Mike's head, knowing he has to tell the others immediately, and let them know so that they are prepared for the gifts, that he definitely exaggerated about to Hopper.

But, he knows his friends, they would have gotten something for El no matter what. So, quickly Mike flees from the police station, hops on his bike, and races home, eager to tell his friends the good news.

The week crept by slowly for El, she had enjoyed her daily conversations with Mike, which did make her days seem a lot less dull. But, the anticipation of her first Christmas loomed in the back of her mind.

When Christmas eve rolled around, El was fascinated by how dedicated Hopper had become when it came to making her first

experience of the holiday, but she loved every minute of it. The small ham he had placed in the oven was much more palatable to her than the microwaved meat that came in their simple meals.

And she loved the way Hopper had even picked up a Christmas movie for them to watch as well. She truly enjoyed spending this time with her new dad, because even though he was her most common companion, she found that he worked a lot, and late, so it was difficult for them to actually interact with one another.

When the credits of the movie began to roll across the screen, she wanted to fight Hopper's suggestion of bed, because she wanted to stay up just a little longer.

At the mention of santa, she found it funny that Hopper couldn't believe that she didn't believe in man in the red suit. But, he just rolled his eyes in defeat, and still pressed her to bed, stating that tomorrow would be a fun day for her.

Reluctantly, she got herself ready for bed, bid goodnight to Hopper and made her way into her room.

At the flick of her head, the bedside lamp turned on and cast a yellowish glow about her room. She jumped onto her bed, and immediately grabbed for her supercom, flicking it on and calling out a small, "Mike?"

It didn't take long for her to hear an answer, "Hey El, you heading to bed?" the boy questioned. El nodded to herself before answering, "Yes, Hopper says tomorrow is a big day".

She listens with a smile as she hears Mike's laugh, "Yeah, Christmas is a lot of fun". She hums into the device, "Still wish I could see you tomorrow" she states wistfully.

Mike sighs, "I know, me too El, but definitely soon, I really would like to see you" his voice is full of longing, which makes El's heart tighten slightly.

"Yeah, soon" she says in a light voice. "But, don't worry EL, we'll definitely talk tomorrow, okay?"

El picks her head up at this, "Yes, want to hear about your Christmas" she states, "Yeah, I want to hear what you get too!" Mike chirps on the other side.

El smiles to herself before letting out a long yawn, not realizing how tired she actually is. "I'm tired" is what she says through the device, and Mike chuckles once again, "Yeah, me too, good night El, I hope santa brings you something special".

El rolls her eyes, knowing Mike is teasing, "I hope so for you too Mike, goodnight" she whispers, before Mike returns with one last "Goodnight!" as both of their devices go silent.

She lets out another long yawn as she sets her supercom right next to her on her night stand. El rolls over and looks up at her ceiling, silently wishing that she could see a particular boy tomorrow.

On the other end of the line, he can't help but smile brightly. He hates that he is lying to El, but he knows that once they see each other tomorrow, it will be more than worth it.

Mike flops down onto his bed, his smile never leaving his face as he begins to think of how tomorrow is going to go.

His friends were more than excited to receive the news that they would all be able to see El on Christmas, and were even more so to be able to give her a gift as well.

He felt his eyelids grow heavy as he drifted off to sleep. His dreams filled with a particular girl and the magic of Christmas.

A sweet smell arouses her from her deep slumber. Her eyelids flutter open as she tries to fight away the sleep. El moves her hands and rubs at her tired eyes, wishing she could go back to sleep.

But the smell taunts her and she begrudgingly flings herself out of her warm bed, and makes her way tiredly to her bedroom door.

She rubs her eyes and lets out a yawn as she pads out into the kitchen.

"Merry Christmas!" a loud voice catches her attention, as she flicks her head over to the owner of the voice. Their eyes meet, but she gives him a confused look "Merry...Christmas?" she whispers. Hopper chuckles, "Yeah, it's what you say to people on Christmas".

El nods her head in understanding looking up at the man with a bright smile, "Merry Christmas!" she returns, and Hopper laughs again as he finishes up their plates for breakfast, bringing them over to the table.

"Alright let's get-", Hopper begins to say, however, El has turned her attention to the Christmas tree and realizes that it has changed over night, and there are brightly colored gifts lingering beneath the tree, "Presents!" El squeals in delight as she sets her direct attention on making her way to the tree.

But before she can even make two steps to the tree, she hears Hopper yell out, "Whoa, there!" and El freezes in her tracks as she turns and gives Hopper her great big doe eyes.

She watches him sigh, "I know it's your first Christmas, and you're excited and all, but let's eat first, *then* you can attack the pile of presents, okay?" he gives her a look.

El's face falls slightly as she looks between her dad and the pile of presents, as she silently debates on whether she might actually not listen to him. But, she knows that he has made her breakfast, and she *should* listen to him, so, she lets her shoulders slump as she turns back towards him, "Fine" she grumbles as she makes her way over.

Hopper places her eggos, bacon and eggs on a pile on her plate just as she sits down, and once she immediately spots that blueberry eggos are in front of her, a smile grows on her face as she looks at Hopper.

"Eggos?" she says brightly, and Hopper nods, "It's Christmas, it's a day for bending the rules" he smiles to her, which she returns as she moves to place a long trail of over her entire plate, even her eggs, which she knows that Hopper and just about everyone else dislikes. But, when Mike first introduced her to the unique combination, she found that she actually enjoyed it too.

Once her plate is thoroughly slathered with syrup, she begins to eat her food quite quickly. She usually likes to enjoy her eggos, but knowing there are presents sitting beneath the tree, she wants to finish as quickly as possible. Hopper reminds her a couple of times to slow down before she chokes on her food, but she manages to finish her plate in record time without any instances of choking.

She looks over to Hopper once her plate is finished and annoyingly, he makes her sit and wait until he is done before they bound over to the Christmas tree.

Once breakfast is completed, El washes her sticky hands as she moves to sit in front of the tree, eyeing each present. She turns to see that Hopper now has a new device in his hands, and she gives him a curious look when he holds it up aiming towards El and the tree, and says, "Smile, kid".

She's not sure what he is doing and just gives him a confused look, he brings the thing down from his eyes and sighs before saying, "I'm taking a picture, just smile and I'll show you". She still doesn't understand what he is doing, but she follows his instructions and decides to give him a big toothy grin.

A bright flash fills the room, which temporarily blinds El, she blinks to get the spots to go away as Hopper states, "Nice!" and walks over to her, showing her a small black object. She looks at it curiously as she watches the photo begin to change, and within a couple seconds, she begins to see herself and the Christmas tree materializing. She opens her mouth in wonder.

"See, we take pictures to document special things, this is definitely one of them" he states, and El smiles at him. He nods to the pile of presents, "Have at it kid, I know you're eager to attack those presents".

And without another word, El dives to the tree and pulls at the first poorly wrapped gift that sits there. Since this is her first time experiencing Christmas, she decides to take it slowly. She digs her fingertips beneath the paper as she tears away the colorful wrapping.

The first gift is a long box that makes a lot of noise when she shakes

it. She looks down at the box, reading the name out loud, "Mon...monop...monopoly?" she words out, looking at Hopper for confirmation. He nods, "Yep, Joyce told me you enjoyed playing it with your friends, figured we could play it, or when they start to come over he shrugs".

El's face lights up, "Thank you!" she chirps as she gently places the game to the side and reaches for the next one.

She spends the next hour going through her gifts and loving each and everyone of them. She receives a bunch of new toys, games and even clothing that seem to be much more her size and she can't help but smile in excitement.

Hopper has her stop here and there when she opens a gift, to hold it up so he can snap a few pictures. She has found that she doesn't mind getting her picture taken, she doesn't like the blinding light, but watching the picture develop before her very eyes intrigues her.

El couldn't believe the amount of things she had received, and believed that she would hopefully be less bored in the cabin now that she has a lot of new things to play with. Her eyes fall on her pile of unwrapped gifts, and smiles softly, she had received a lot of new games but she knew that most of them required someone to play with her.

She silently hoped that she would be able to show Mike and the rest of the party all of her new toys and wished even more so that she would get to play with them, all together, soon.

Once her pile of presents had disappeared, she moved to hers and Hoppers stockings, removed them from the wall and approached the man with both in her hand. With a bright smile, she hands him his stocking.

"Thanks, E" he says with a smile as he takes the stocking from the girl. She again eagerly dives into her red stocking pulling candy and small trinkets from the overly large sock. There are a lot of new candies that she hasn't seen, and she can't wait to try them.

After El finishing up with the stockings, and all of her gifts had been

open, she turns to Hopper and gives him a soft look, "Thank you" she whispers to him. He then reaches forward and ruffles her curls, "Anytime kid, did you enjoy your first Christmas?" he asks with raised eyebrows.

She grins, "The best" she states simply as she looks through all of her new belongings once again. Hopper stands to his feet as he begins to ball up the discarded wrapping paper and throw them into the trash, "Glad to hear kid, why don't you bring your new belongings into your room?"

El nods eagerly as she collects her new things and brings them into her room, delicately placing them throughout her room. To her, they are precious treasures.

Seeing her pile of new clothing, she grows giddy with wanting to try them on, so she decides to move to the bathroom, where she gets into the shower. Once she is done and dried off, she moves to dress herself in a pair of new jeans that actually fit her correctly and a warm, knitted green sweater that feels as if it is giving her a tight hug.

She emerges from the bathroom, and is caught off guard when Hopper says from the couch, "You look good kid". And with the sincerity in his voice she can't help but duck her head in embarrassment. She continues to move across the living room as she heads into her room, having one goal in mind.

El had glanced at the clock and read, four-thirty. She figured that Mike had probably been done with his Christmas by now, and she wanted to see what he had gotten.

So, she plops onto her bed, grabs the supercom and whispers a quick, "Mike?" She waits in eager anticipation to hear the boy's voice through the device. But, after a minute or so, nothing. So, she tries again...and then again...but, she never hears his voice.

She huffs in annoyance and sadness, believing that he probably hasn't finished his Christmas yet. In a slip of anger she flings the supercom down onto her bed, it bounces lightly against the soft mattress. She glares angrily at it before she lands down on the bed beside the device, curling herself up into a tight ball, fighting back tears.

She's trying to remain calm, and barely notices a small knock at her door, "Hey El, everything okay?" Hopper's voice enters her room as he pushes open her door.

She really doesn't want to say anything, but the frown on Hopper's face makes her do so anyways, "He's not answering" her voice is muffled against her jeans.

Hopper sighs, placing a gentle hand on her shoulder. "He's probably busy, his family celebrates Christmas too" Hopper tries to assure her.

Even though El knows that Hopper is probably right, it still hurts her, and she lets out a long breath, "He said he would call" she mumbles sadly. Hopper huffs, "It's still early kid, maybe he'll call later", he tries, but she shakes her head, "Miss him...and the others, wish I could see them". And she knows she's being 'dramatic' as Hopper sometimes calls her when she overreacts about things. However, deep down, she does feel sad.

It hurts her to know that Mike and the others are together having a fun time. And even though she loved the presents and spending time with her new dad, knowing that her others friends were probably all together made her heart ache.

Hopper lets out a long breath before he speaks again, "Well...why don't we try-" but before he can finish, there's a knock on the door. And immediately El perks up, as she begins to think that there's someone bad at the door, no one *ever* comes to the cabin unless it's Hopper.

She turns her terrified eyes to him as she tries to hide away even more so against her bed. Hopper tries to reassure her with a soft look, "Don't worry, I'll go see who it is", he says as he stands and moves across the room.

El sits huddled in her bed as she pulls at her sheets, wishing she could just melt away. "*No, no, don't let them find us!*" scurries through her brain as she can feel her heart pounding within her chest.

She listens carefully from her room as Hopper makes his way to the door, and she hears it creak open. But, then there's nothing, she then

grows confused, but is quickly startled when Hopper's voice rings through the cabin, "Hey E, it's okay why don't you come out and say hi!"

She grows even more confused. *"Who would be safe for Hopper to welcome into the cabin?"* floats through her head as she slowly peels herself away from her bed, tiptoeing through her room, worried that maybe the bad men have Hopper cornered and are making him have her come out.

So, she decides to take it slow as she creaks the door open slowly, as El moves outside of her room, a curious look on her face, "Dad who-?" but her question falls short as Hopper moves out of the way to reveal the faces of Mike, Will and Dustin standing in the doorway.

And she honestly can't believe what she's seeing. Her hands move up to her mouth as she gasps in surprise and tears well within her eyes as her sight settles on the dark haired boy who is doing nothing but smiling in glee at her.

She doesn't move, afraid that this is all a dream and she'll wake up any minute. But, Mike takes a hesitant step forward and says, "Hi, El", and it's all she needs as she lowers her hands from her mouth, a bright smile growing on her face as she sniffles and launches herself forward, running as fast as she can across the living room, and into Mike's open and awaiting arms.

The second she's in his arms, she knows that this is real. She feels Mike steady them as the force of her running into his arms nearly knocks them to the ground.

"Mike!" El squeals in delight as they rock against one another in their hug. Mike laughs, "I'm glad you're excited to see me!" his voice is muffled against her shoulder, and she giggles in delight as she remains within his arms feeling his warmth radiate against her, she practically melts.

And she could honestly stay that way forever if it wasn't for a loud clearing of throat to disrupt them. They pull back from each other slightly, looking at Hopper who is giving them a look. And realizing their proximity they slowly break apart with reddened cheeks, but

dopey smiles.

"Geez, I thought you'd never let her go Mike, I'd like to get a hug in with El too!" Dustin steps forward as El moves to hug the curly haired boy.

"Merry Christmas!" she chirps as she envelopes the boy happily, "Merry Christmas to you too, El!" Dustin says happily as they end their hug in a much shorter time than El's and Mike's previous one.

She then side steps and her gaze meets Will's shy one, "Uh, hi El, merry Christmas" his voice is light and El smiles as she moves and gives Will a small hug, "Merry Christmas to you" she whispers, smiling as she pulls away.

El looks at each one of her friends with a winning smile. She truly can't believe that her Christmas wish had actually came true.

"Max and Lucas are on their way, we had to come in two groups" Mike moves so that he is right next to El as he explains this to her.

At the mention of Max's name, it makes El cringe slightly, she still didn't feel good about the fiery haired girl, not after what had happened in the gym. But, she is excited for Lucas to come, so she tries to hold back her disdain by giving a tight smiling and saying "Okay", in a small voice.

"So, did you have a nice Christmas?" Mike asks, and with that prompt, El eagerly jumps into explaining her Christmas gifts, "Yes, it was amazing! Come on, I want to show you all my gifts!" she exclaims as she moves to interlace her hands with Mike's, and gives a nod to Dustin and Will to follow them.

She all but yanks Mike into her room with the other two trailing behind as she flicks her head at her door, shutting it behind them.

El continues to grip Mike's hand tightly as she moves about her room showing the boys her new games, toys and outfits she had received. The boys were eagerly impressed by her haul.

"Aw, what! Hopper got you Monopoly! I asked and didn't get it" he pouted as El showed him the new game she received, as Mike and

Will chuckle.

El smiles brightly to herself to have the boys impressed with her gifts. "You even got a bunch of great card games too!" Will states as he paws through her new decks.

They settle into her room, sitting on her floor as they all chat idly about how the others Christmas' had gone. She listens with fascination at the video games, comics and toys the boys had received. But, of course when Mike gushed over his new super nintendo, El couldn't tare her eyes away from the boy, her hand tightening around his.

When he realizes the new pressure, he turns and gives her a quick look, and gives her a tender smile which just about melts her heart.

He had never wanted Christmas day to pass as fast as he was willing it to go. On a regular Christmas every glance at the clock meant it was almost over, but now, he wished it to go faster, wanting to get to El as fast as possible.

Dustin and Will agreed that they would be at the house no later than four-thirty, while Max and Lucas would follow along, but they would wait another fifteen minutes before approaching the cabin.

What he found difficult was explaining to his mom that he would be going over to a new friends house, which he did the same night Hopper had given the okay for he and the party to come over.

He knew is mom was always in a better mood when he helped out during dinner. So, when he heard his mom puttering around in the kitchen, he decided to make his way into the kitchen.

Taking a deep breath, he approached his mom, "Uh..hi mom, do you need any help?" and as his cracking voice made its way through the kitchen, his mom stopped what she was doing, turning towards her son.

She quipped an eyebrow up at him, "What do you want, Mike?" her voice was teasing and knowing. But, Mike still couldn't believe his

mom picked up on his ruse so quickly.

He pretended to not notice though, "Oh..uh nothing...just thought you could use some help is all" he tries to sound nonchalant.

However, his mom gives him a knowing smile, "You never help with dinner unless you want something, now what is it?"

Feeling as though he was a deer caught in the headlights Mike sighs roughly as he makes his way into the kitchen, leaning himself against the counter.

His mom continues to move about the kitchen, waiting for him to continue. He finally gives in, "So...I wanted to ask...could I go to a friend's house...after Christmas?" his voice wavers slightly.

Karen moves about the kitchen, "Well, your friends are all coming over, what do you mean?" she asks slightly confused.

Mike cringes slightly, hoping to maybe weasel around the mention of El, but obviously his mom knew him well, "Uhm...well...the thing is...it's a new friend" he explains.

This stops Karen slightly, giving her son a look, "Oh, a new friend?" she inquires.

Mike nods his head, his shaggy hair moving about, "Yeah, they don't live nearby, they're new to town and me and the others wanted to make sure they felt welcome...is all" he couldn't believe how lame his story sounded.

"Who is this new friend anyways?" she asks, quirked an eyebrow to him. Mike sighs, knowing his mom is going to badger him until he comes clean, "Look...the chief is adopting a kid" he starts, and now his mom's full attention is on him.

"The chief!? A kid?" she questions incredulously. Mike nods, "Yeah, he uhm...he found out he had a daughter, and her mom isn't well...and now he's taking her in" he lies lamely, mentally reminding himself he will have to explain this story to Hopper so that they all remain consistent.

"A daughter? So this new *friend* is a girl?" and he doesn't miss the nudge his mom is sending his way. Mike huffs and rolls his eyes, "Yes, she's a girl, just...shy is all".

"Oh so you've met her!" Karen's face is full of excitement as she approaches Mike, who tries to hide his reddening face, "Uhm...yeah, at the store, we uhm...we met her with Hopper, she's nice and Hopper asked us to be friendly to her, and we thought since she's new...we'd visit her on Christmas" he tries lamely.

He's surprised when his mom brightens even more so, "Oh, that's so sweet of you Mike!" she coos at him, "Ugh, mom!" he strains for her to stop before she goes too far, but of course Mike can see she's picked something up, and she's not going to let go.

"Must be you like her if you want to spend Christmas with her" his mom teases. Mike doesn't answer, but instead opens his mouth, flabbergasted and he can feel his cheeks redden even more so.

"Look, you're blushing, she must be special!" Karen throws a wink in his direction as she turns back to her cooking.

"Mom!" he whines, feeling utterly embarrassed by the whole situation. "Oh Mike don't worry, I think it's cute! But, of course you guys can go over and see this girl, I think it will be nice!"

And that's all Mike needs before his mom presses him even more about El, before he throws her a quick, "Alright, thanks mom!" and disappears out of the kitchen.

Now, even after receiving some great Christmas gifts, Mike finds himself with Will and Dustin peddling their bikes through the cold December air as they head towards the cabin.

Mike's excitement radiates around him, and it doesn't go unnoticed by his friends, who tease him relentlessly on their way to the cabin. However, Mike ignores them, his thoughts only on one person: El.

When they finally make their way through the winding woods from the directions Hopper had given him, they can make out the small

glow from the cabins windows.

They slow to a stop as they place their bikes against nearby trees as they walk towards the cabin. "This is kind of weird" Dustin mumbles as he follows Mike's steps, as he keeps his eyes peeled for the trip wire Hopper had told him about.

Mike throws out his arm suddenly, just barely stopping Dustin from tripping the wire that is just barely gleaming in the moonlight above them.

"Watch it!" Mike yells, holding Dustin back. The curly haired boy fumbles lightly at his quick stop, "Geez, guess Hopper isn't taking any risks" he states flatly.

Mike rolls his eyes, "Just, be careful, let's go" he states as he only just wants to get to the cabin as quickly as possible.

His footsteps fall quickly up the old wooden steps that led to the cabin, Will's and Dustin's falling quickly behind.

As he approaches the door, his heart pulses quickly as he raises his hand to knock at the door. He does them quickly and then steps away.

He waits, not so patiently, for Hopper to approach the door, it swings open, and Mike opens his mouth to say something, but Hopper quickly gestures for them to be quiet.

Mike understands as Hopper lets them inside, shutting the door behind them as Hopper turns his head towards the other end of the cabin, "Hey E, it's okay why don't you come out and say hi!"

And at this Mike anxiously tries to look over Hopper's shoulder so that he can set his eyes on El the moment she walks out. And a long minute later, he finally sees her appear from what he must assume is her room.

"Dad who-" she starts to say, but then, their eyes meet and it's like the whole world stops. She's the most beautiful girl he's ever seen. Her hair is curlier than ever before, as she is dressed in a new bright green sweater and light jeans. Mike's pretty sure his heart is about to

beat out of his chest as he watches her.

She seems uncertain, like this is a dream, and he knows he feels just about the same. So, he takes a shy step forward and says, "Hi, El", and that's all she needs before she breaks down and begins a short sprint to him.

He opens his arms, awaiting for her presence, and seconds later, he's holding onto her for dear life. He has to steady himself as she crashes into him, not wanting to fall over, he chuckles into her.

"Mike!" she exclaims happily, as he buries his head into her neck, he breathes her in, taking in the scent of woodsmoke and a watermelon shampoo, he practically melts. "I'm glad you're excited to see me!", he can't help but joke as El laughs into his shoulder.

And he's pretty sure that he could have remained there in that moment for the rest of his life, as long as it meant that El remained in his arms, that's all that he cared about.

But, of course their moment can't last forever, especially when her new dad clears his throat behind them. He and El break apart quickly, giving each other knowing looks, and bashful smiles. And Mike doesn't care about the awkwardness that fills the space, because he's here with El, and nothing will take away from his happiness.

He watches as Dustin and Will exchange smaller greetings with his girlfriend. And once their exchanges are completed, he turns back to El and smiles, "Lucas and Max are on their way, we had to come in two groups" he explains, believing that El would be happy to see the rest of the group.

But instead, he sees a flash of worry and even anger come across her face, at it seems like she silently debates saying something. However, she gives a small smile and says "Okay".

Even though they had only been together for a short time, he finds El easy to read sometimes, and it seems as if there is something that is bothering her. But, he can also tell that she doesn't want to talk about it, so he moves on, "So, how was your Christmas?" he asks, and that's all it takes for El's behavior to change.

He sighs to himself watching her change and get hyped up about explaining her Christmas and all of the new gifts she had received. Before he gets a chance, El moves quickly towards him, he thinks she's going to give him another hug, but instead she reaches for his hand, entangling their fingers together as she all but yanks him towards her room, gesturing for Will and Dustin to follow.

And that's how they spend the next half an hour of El showing off her new toys and games, and Mike couldn't be happier to see so much joy in El. Their entwined hands makes his heart soar because even as she shows them her room, she never lets go, and he's pretty sure it's the best Christmas gift he could ask for.

They're all idling talking until Hopper's voice can be heard through El's wooden door, "El, the rest of your friends are here, come and greet them!" he calls, and with smiles all around, the friends get to their feet to greet the rest.

Mike can't find the exhilaration that fills him when El continues to hold onto his hand, and what he notices even more is that the second they are standing, El is next to him like a magnet.

They exit her room and make their way to Lucas and Max, who are brightly grinning at their friends arrival.

They all exchange 'merry Christmas' with one another, Mike watches as El moves to hug Lucas. However, he notices he barely gives Max even a smile, and once she has finished her hug with Lucas, she goes immediately to his side, her hand tightly entwining with his. And it's in that moment he might have a slight understanding of what might be bothering El.

He has to admit, when he, Dustin and Lucas found her in the woods, she spent the majority of her time around them....boys. And then living with Hopper, he was a male as well. And although it was obvious El loved Joyce and enjoyed Nancy, she had never been around a girl their age. He was beginning to think that El must not know how to interact with a girl their age. And he decided that when it was just the two of them, they would have a discussion, just to make sure she was okay.

Mike's brought out of his thoughts as Dustin begins to speak in his loud voice, "Hey, El got a bunch of new games for Christmas, let's break them out!" they all agree with enthusiasm as they move once again to El's room and disappear behind her door.

She finds herself *very* excited to have all of her friends packed into her small room, to her, it makes everything cozy and warm. El is very excited to be able to share this with her friends.

They all move to sit in a tight circle next to one another, of course, she parks herself right next to Mike and clasps their hands together once again. She gives a shy look to the shaggy haired boy, and she finds his warm eyes on her, and a brilliant smile to match.

El feels her face heat up being caught looking at her boyfriend, but the small squeeze he gives her hand reassures her that it's alright.

"Let's see what we got here", Dustin voice rings through her small room, as all eyes are on him as he searches through El's new collection of games.

"Oh, how about this one!" he cries as he pulls up a narrow, red box with, *Charades*, written across the box in white letters.

El squints at the box, "What's, charads?" she tries to sound out the new word. Her group of friends chuckle lightly, and El feels herself getting a little embarrassed, not sure as to what she did wrong.

"Charades" Max corrects the girl, which makes El scrunch up her face in annoyance. Mike pushes his shoulder against hers, "Don't worry, they're just teasing" he whispers to her. And although El knows that her friends are just picking on her lightly, just like they do with the rest of their friends, it annoys her more that *Max* was the one who corrected her.

Before she can say anything else, Dustin returns to their group and sits with them, opening the brand new box and saying, "It's a really fun game El, we get put into teams, draw a card, and then our teammate has to figure out what we are through acting. The person acting can't say anything though, and the teammates only get a

couple of minutes to figure out what their teammate is acting" he shrugs his shoulders as he gets the game ready.

El nods her head slightly, the rules seem simple enough. "Here, we'll show you first, so you get the gist of it" Dustin says as he stands, a card in his hand. The group of friends then scoot back so that they are in a straight line, Dustin standing in front of them.

El watches with a confused look as Dustin begins to gesture wildly, and within seconds, El is lost. However, her knight in shining armor is always one step ahead as she feels his warm breath on her skin, "See how he just held up two fingers, that means there are two words he needs to act out", and El listens animatedly while Mike whispers to her everything Dustin is doing while Max, Will and Lucas are screaming at him a bunch of random words to try to guess.

"Time's up" Will states sadly as they had not figured out what Dustin was trying to act out. El chuckles when Dustin lets out an exasperated sigh, "Guys, seriously it was *The Goonies!*" everyone lets out long exasperated breaths.

"Dustin, seriously how is-" and El watches as Lucas repeats one of Dustin's estranged motions, "*The Goonies?!!*", he raises his hands in defeat.

"Tch, whatever, like *you* could do better" he states as he folds his arms over his chest in annoyance.

"It was just a practice run anyways to show El how to play" Will offers, and the others agree, he then turns to El, and he gives her a soft look, "What do you say El? Ready to give it a try?"

El softens, thoroughly enjoying getting to know Will, because she finds that he is just as quiet and reserved as she is, so she gives him a small nod and smile.

"Awesome, let's break up into teams!" Dustin says excitedly. El turns to Mike expectantly, however, Dustin catches this. "Oh no, you two aren't going to be making goo-goo eyes at each other the whole time, we're doing this randomly".

And at Dustin's remark, she sighs, turning to look at Mike, who speaks up, "Come on guys, it's her first time playing" he tries to argue.

"We can help her out too you know" Lucas says matter of factly. Mike rolls his eyes, "Whatever, how is it going to be random anyways?" he asks, but it seems Dustin is already on it as he takes off his hat and turns to the small desk in El's room.

He picks up a piece of scrap paper and begins writing and tearing at the paper. He places the torn pieces of paper into his hat and gives it a quick shake.

"Alright, we'll let fate decide our teams, so don't worry El, you could still be on Mike's team" he throws her a wink, which makes her relax slightly.

"Okay, we'll do two teams of three, Will, will you do the honors" he says as he holds the hat out to Will, who rolls his eyes at Dustin lame joke.

Will reaches into Dustin's hat and counts out three papers, "So, team one will be Dustin, El and Lucas, which means team two is Max, Mike and I" he says with a small smile.

El deflates greatly after hearing the teams, not only was she *not* on Mike's team, but he was grouped with Max, and for some reason, it made her blood boil.

Mike, seemingly knowing that she did not like the match up, comes to stand beside her, as he links his hand with hers, she turns her light eyes up to him. "Don't worry El, it's just for a little bit, besides we won't play it all night" he gives her a cute grin, which makes her melt.

And she realizes she's being a little dumb, so she gives him a half nod, as he slowly breaks their held hands apart, moving to stand with Max and Will.

"Okay, let's get started!" Dustin pumps his fist into the air as he passes the box of cards to Mike's team, who decides to go first.

Mike gives a half eye roll when Max and Will push him to go first, so,

he reaches in and pulls out a card, and then he smiles, "Alright, guess this one isn't too hard" he states as he moves to stand and begins to act out his card.

Dustin flips over the small timer and Mike begins.

El finds herself having a lot of fun watching each of her friends act out their cards. Some, she is surprised that she actually knows, thanks to Hopper renting movies and having her do so much reading.

She enjoys watching Mike act out his card the most as she finds herself giggling along with the rest of her friends as he miserably fails at acting out *Gone With the Wind*.

"Come on Wheeler, you've got to do better than that!" Max half complains, half jokes to the boy. And the moment their interaction begins, El's eyes are on them.

She watches as Mike gives her a half smile and gives her a slight shove, "Like you could do better, Mayfield", he teases.

El *really* doesn't like this interaction, and she can feel her rage building within her. But, it softens lightly when Mike moves past Max and his dark eyes meet hers and he gives her a winning smile and then a quick wink.

She lets out a long breath, allowing the small moment between the two pass, and she decides to move on.

El finds that she is a decent actor, especially when she pulls the card *Painting*, she sighs slightly to herself for being able to pull an easy card for her first time.

So, she moves to stand front and center in front of her friends, waiting for Dustin to give her the go ahead.

"Okay El, timer's set, go!" he cries pointing to the girl, and she begins to elaborately explain what she is doing with just hand symbols and wild gestures. She can't help but giggle through her gestures as Dustin and Lucas cry out wild ideas.

She finally gestures for them to settle and just have them watch her. So she paints an imaginary square in the air, almost like that guy she has seen on t.v, who talks about the 'happy trees'.

Finally, Lucas jumps to his feet and yells, "Painting!" at the top of his lungs, and El cheers and says, "Yes!"

This then delegates for Dustin and Lucas to jump in the air and cheer at their victory. "Yes, that puts us in the lead!" Dustin cries, pointing at the other team in victory.

El feels the joy and happiness bubbling within her, she's never enjoyed a moment like this in her life, and she knows she would be extremely happy to be able to experience it again and again.

However, that happiness falls somewhat short when Max pops up from her seat, moving to the deck of cards sitting between all of them, "Oh, whatever you guys, it's my turn anyways, and I'll show you how it's really done", she boasts as she draws the card.

Her eyes move across the card and she huffs lightly, deciding how she will probably go about doing the next card.

She ponders for a minute, but then says, "Alright, let's go!" and Dustin flips the timer over as Max begins to act out whatever action her card has negotiated for her to perform.

She holds her hands out as if she is flying and has a calm look on her face, El honestly has no idea what she is trying to do.

"Uh, an airplane!" Will calls out, and Max shakes her head, "Skydiving?" Mike calls out uncertainty laced in his voice. But Max shakes her head again.

She tries to change her action, but Mike and Will's next guesses are futile. "Grrrr....Wheeler, come here!" she growls as she moves to pull Mike towards her.

And once again, that tumultive feeling begins to overwhelm El once again. As she watches the red head grab onto Mike's arms as she positions him behind her, Mike looking as if he is totally lost.

She then haphazardly stands in front of him, reaching behind her and placing his hands on her hips, as she takes the flying pose once again.

However, El sees nothing but red within her eyes as she watches the two interact with one another. And it's the sight of Mike's hands on Max's hip, and the fact that their standing so close, each with a matching blush covering their faces, that El loses it, her worst fears coming to life right before her eyes.

"Oh, *Titanic!*" Will calls out, and Max pushes away from Mike quickly as if he was burning her and cries "Yes! That's it!"

But, El doesn't hear any of this, because her blind fury has taken over, and she can't handle what she's watching anymore. And before she knows it, she's on her feet, and bolting towards the door, flinging it open.

She trudges out into the living room, as she barely hears Mike calling out behind her, "El, wait, what's wrong!?" he cries trying to keep up with her. She honestly doesn't even want to look at him as she approaches the door that leads outside, but she turns to face him, tears trickling down her face before she growls, "Nothing!" into his face, slipping through the door and slamming it in front of Mike's face.

Once the door closes behind her, the cool night air dances around her. She feels the cold pull goosebumps onto her skin, but she doesn't care. Her heart aches desperately in this moment and she doesn't know exactly what to do.

She flips her head to the left, and sees the lone porch swing gliding gently against the night air, so, she decides to make her way towards it, and parks herself on it.

It groans at the new weight as El stares blankly into the night. '*Tonight was supposed to be special*' dances through her head, and a fresh wave of tears begin to flow freely down her face. And that's when the small sobs begin to swell within her chest, and she allows them to come as she pulls her knees into her chest and cries silently to the night.

El had never experienced a feeling like this before, and it was hard for her to name. Just the way Max and Mike acted around each other sometimes, it made all of her rational sense melt away. And all she felt in the end was blankness, as if someone had reached deep within her chest and pulled out her heart.

Before too much time passes, she hears the faint creaking of the front door opening. She flicks her eyes over and sees that Mike is coming towards her, however, she honestly wants nothing to do with him.

So, she tucks herself deeper into her knees and snuffles as he moves haphazardly to stand before her.

"El" Mike's voice is soft, but tinged with sadness. She doesn't look at him, nor respond. Mike stands there for a moment, before he moves and sits himself right next to her, but keeping some space between them.

He lets out a long breath, "El, I've got to know what had you upset? We've got to talk about these things" his voice warbles slightly.

El can hear it in his voice that he wants to talk, but, honestly, she has no idea what's going on with her, why she's having these feelings.

When she doesn't respond Mike tries again, "I know...I know it's not easy to talk sometimes, about our feelings, but...that's why I'm here El, that's why we're together, we talk about things that upset us because...because we trust one another".

And at his words, El softens and feels herself let go of some of the emotions she is feeling, she finally turns her head towards Mike. Her eyes settle on his, and she melts the instant she sees the warmth and worry that riddles his face.

Mike then reaches forward, slowly, as he uses a gentle finger to wipe away her tears, and she knows she has to speak. "I..." she starts, unsure as to what to say about her feelings. But then she takes in a deep breath and tells the boy she *does* trust exactly what she's feeling, "I...don't like Max" are what come out, and Mike is taken aback slightly.

"You don't like Max?" he repeats and El nods her head in return. Mike ponders this for a minute before asking, "Why?"

And, truthfully, El doesn't know *why* she doesn't like Max, but there's something there that scares her slightly when she sees Max and Mike together, so, she decides to explain it that way. "Don't like....you and her...together" she states, looking down at her feet that she has moved to dangle from the swing.

She hears Mike let out a quick breath, "Oh, so *that's* what this is about" his voice sounds affirming, and El turns to look at the boy with a questioning look.

He smiles at her, which makes her even more confused. "Why are you smiling?" she asks, and Mike shakes his head, as he reaches for her, grasping his hand with hers.

"El...what you're feeling...it's called jealousy" he explains, El squints her eyes, she's heard the word before, *a lot* on her favorite soap operas, however, she's never quite understood the word.

Mike knows immediately that he needs to explain more, "Jealousy, it means when you feel almost like an anger at a person because they have something, or *someone* that you don't. Or, maybe they do something that makes you feel anger, like when Max had me put my hands on her hips".

And at this El frowns hard, turning away from Mike, "No, I didn't like that" she grumbles. And Mike chuckles at her, she flips her head back to him, "Sorry, it's just, El...you've got nothing to be jealous about with Max and I", he explains.

El finds her eyes searching his face. "At the school, you seemed happy" she says, and now it's Mike's turn to be confused, "The school?" he questions her, and El nods sadly.

"I was there when Max fell off her...skateboard, didn't like seeing you two together, happy, smiling" she goes on to explain.

Mike softens beside her as he squeezes her hand tightly. "El, look at me", he states and just because she knows she can't resist, she moves

her sad eyes up to the freckled face boy.

He's giving her a serious look, "First...I knew you were there" he smiles at her. "I knew when Max said something about the skateboard being yanked out from under her that...it couldn't just be that she was a bad skateboarder", he jokes, and El smiles at this as well.

"But, before, she wanted to be apart of our group and Dustin and Lucas had a crush on her as well, but...for me, I wanted nothing to do with her" his voice is soft.

"I felt as if Dustin and Lucas were trying to replace you, and I hated them for it, I hated her" he stresses.

"I..I was in a really bad place while you were gone El, it sucked *every day*, not knowing where you were, or if you were okay" his voice breaks slightly as El listens to everyone of his words.

"El, you mean *so* much to me, if I didn't feel *something* for you, I wouldn't have called you for three hundred and fifty three days, I wouldn't have moped around like some lovesick fool" he tries to lighten the situation.

"Please don't *ever* believe that there is *anything* going on between Max and I, you're all I have eyes for" his voice dips to a whisper, and El finds herself moving closer to the boy, hanging off his every word.

"Promise?" she can't help but say with a small smile dancing across her face. Mike smiles back at this, "Promise, *always*, and besides, Lucas really likes her, and I know Max likes Lucas, so nothing will *ever* happen" he shrugs his shoulders.

This pulls on El slightly, "Max...and Lucas...are like, you and me?" she questions. Mike shrugs his shoulders again, "I mean, I know they like one another, but I don't know if they're anything official, like you and me".

El nods at this, feeling much better about everything, and realizing that she's been silly, and...she's been a bad friend to Max too.

"Mike?" she turns towards the boy, "Yeah, El?", she searches his face once again, "Could...could you get Max...I want to talk to her" she

says firmly.

And at this, Mike smiles, "Of course El, are we okay?" he asks hesitantly.

El looks at the boy, and she can see that this whole thing has gotten him worried, and she hates that she was the one who made him feel that way.

So, she leans forward and wraps her arms tightly around her boyfriend's neck as she nuzzles into him, as Mike returns the pressure around her hips, "I'm sorry, and yes, we're okay" she sighs into his neck.

Mike chuckles as he pulls away, "Good, wait here and I'll grab Max, okay?" She nods and smiles even brighter when Mike moves forward and plants a gentle kiss upon her forehead. And, it's a different feeling then when her and Mike's lips join together, there's something *special* about this lingering kiss that he plants on her head, and it makes her shiver, as she watches Mike move back towards the cabin, her heart much fuller than before.

She doesn't have to wait long for the cabin door to open once again, El casts a careful look over her right shoulder to see that Max has appeared, she has her arms wrapped tightly around her midsection, El watches her shiver slightly as she approaches.

The redhead gives El a gentle smile as she stands in front of her, "So...Wheeler said you wanted to talk?" she asks the shyer girl.

El nods lightly "Yes...you can sit" she says gently gesturing to the now vacated seat beside her.

Max's eyes flick over to where El has just gestured, and with some hesitation, she comes to sit beside El, keeping a good space between them as the swing begins to rock back and forth.

El finds the movement soothing, and it seems to guide her to what she wants to say to the girl beside her.

"I'm sorry" is what escapes her mouth, and El can feel Max's eyes on her. "Sorry, for what?" Max questions.

El turns slowly to the girl, a bit surprised at her response, El opens her mouth to speak, finding the words difficult for her to find, "I'm sorry...for...not being nice" is the best way she can describe it.

Max nods slowly as she sucks in her bottom lip, evaluating El's words. When she lets her lip go her light eyes are on El's, "Why don't you like me?" is her next question.

El finds herself taken aback a bit, but, by the way she had treated Max before hand, she guesses she shouldn't be surprised that Max believed that, she, didn't like her.

El swallows before speaking, "I thought...I thought...you liked Mike" her voice is soft. And El watches as Max's eyes first go wide, and then her face contorts into a look of disgust.

"Ugh, Wheeler! No thank you!" she all but yells as she throws her hands out, her warm breath becoming visible in the cool night air.

She can't help but feel a bit annoyed at Max's response, and she must have shown it on her face because Max begins to laugh and shake her head, "Look, it's nothing against Mike, he's just not my type is all" she shrugs her shoulder.

El relaxes at her words, and a silence stretches between them for a bit, and then Max nudges her shoulder, which makes El turn her attention to the other girl. Max is giving her a soft look, "You and Mike are meant to be together, El. When we first met all he did was grumble about and he wanted nothing to do with me", she smiles.

"And...all he could ever talk about...was you" her words catch El off guard slightly as they look at each other. Max looks out to the endless trees that disappear into the darkness of the night. "There's something between the two of you that I've never seen. And it's special. Trust me, nothing will be able to break you two apart" she giggles.

El holds onto Max's words, and she can feel herself become lighter and more understanding of the girl beside her.

Max shivers once again, "Besides, I think you'll need a girl around if you need to talk about boys and girl stuff too" she shrugs. And the

grin that pulls against the quiet girls mouth extends into a toothy grin, "That'd be nice".

Max nods and then sticks out her hand, "So, that being said, are we friends?"

El looks at the girls hand, and reaches her out so that they clasp them together, and they move them up and down, "Friends" El says quietly, and everything that had happened before hand dissipates into nothingness, as they both allow their new friendship to shape and blossom.

"Can we go back in, I'm freezing, and I'm sure Mike's dying to see you" Max jokes as she stands and another shiver wracks through her body. El giggles standing next to the girl, "Yes, and I bet Lucas misses you too" she jokes.

Max's eyes go wide, "How'd you...Wheeler" she growls, but El giggles at the girl, in which Max returns as they head to the door, making their way back inside.

He all but breathes a sigh of relief once he hears El and Max make their way back inside, giggling. It seems everything has been set straight, and things can finally move on.

Mike mentally berated himself for not realizing that El's problem with Max hadn't been that she's a girl, but the fact that she could be a girl pinning for Mike's attention. He was more than thankful to get a chance to explain to El their actual relationship, and in no way possible would he ever see Max in a romantic way. The thought made him shiver in disgust.

However, when he sees the girls re-enter the cabin, giggling and whispering to one another, he was happy to see that this was a blossoming relationship. For El to have a girl her age to talk to, it actually made him feel slightly relieved, because in the back of his mind he was terrified to have El ask him about womanly things, and now, he could hopefully pass that baton off to Max.

He approaches the girls and gives them a nod, "Everything good?"

and Max and El turn to look at each other with great big grins before El moves to stand beside him, taking his hand in hers and stating, "All good".

"That's great to hear, the guys are dying to make cookies El, we should get into" he nods to the kitchen.

"Make cookies?" she gives him a questioning look. "Hopper, you've never baked cookies for this girl?" Max turns with her hands on her hips to the older man, who holds his hands up in defense.

"Tch, me cook cookies, you're funny red", is all he says before he moves out of the kitchen.

Mike turns towards El's room, "Hey guys, come on, let's show El how to bake Christmas cookies!" he shouts.

And not even a second later, Dustin, Lucas and Will bound out of El's room cheering, "We've got to do sugar cookies!" Will states as they move into the kitchen.

"Of course! That's the classic!" Dustin agrees.

And Mike turns to El squeezing her hand, "Ready for a mess?" he jokes. And El looks brightly up at him, "Yes" she says excitedly, and the next half hour is spent in the kitchen.

They are all laughing and joking with one another as they make a huge mess in the kitchen. Mike sticks right next to El as she dumps in the needed ingredients for the sugar cookies. He can't take his eyes off of her as she joyously combines everything together, and the wonder that shines in her eyes as she watches the cookies come to life.

When it's time for the flour, Mike can't help but throw a small dusting at El, who gasps in shock, turning to look at the boy who is trying to remain coy about what he had just done. And, in quick retaliation, El tosses a bit of flour his way, and it lands directly into his face, causing him to scrunch up his face.

He listens as El's melodious laughter brings so much joy to him. When he opens his eyes, she's looking directly at him, reaching

forward and trying to blot some of the flour out of his eyes.

"Sorry, didn't mean to get it into your eyes" she sounds slightly concerned, but there's a lightness behind it. Mike shakes his shaggy hair, "It's fine El, I did it first" he admits, but he is silently enjoying the closeness between them.

She seems to sense it too, because now their eyes don't leave one another, and before he knows it, he's leaning in, and he can see her doing the same. He watches as her eyes flicker to his lips, and then they begin to flutter close, and his are too.

Their breath is on one another, inches away, but before they can share a kiss, Mike feels something hit his face.

He sputters as he moves away, blinking his eyes, and seeing El is doing the same. They both flick their heads to a round of laughter in front of them, and they see that Dustin, Lucas and Will are laughing at them.

"Oh geez, you two are so easy to startle!" Dustin barrel's over while laughing, while Mike is pretty sure his face is beet red, totally forgetting that he and El were surrounded by their friends, which totally wrecked their intimate moment together.

"Ugh, whatever guys" he states as he moves to El, who's trying to get the flour out of her eyes. "Your alright El?" he asks gently as he moves to get a wet rag to blot at her eyes.

She giggles, "Yes, I'm fine", and then she turns to the rest of her friends giving them a look, which silences them. And, with a quick flick of her head, the bag of open flour that sits on the counter flings at the boys across the table, and seconds later, they are sputtering and coughing out flour.

This in turn makes Mike burst out laughing, followed along by El and Max. "Oh, you guys better watch who you prank, El's got one up on you", Max exclaims.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever" Lucas mutters as he shakes the flour off of him.

Mike's laughter ceases slightly when he feels a soft pressure on his cheek. He turns quickly to El, who gives him a shy look, in which makes him give her a dopey grin.

"Can we bake the cookies now?" she asks gently. Mike can barely speak, "Of course".

And the group of friends move about the kitchen, able to place a batch of cookies in the oven.

"There, got that done, now, we need to give El her gifts!" Dustin strains, which brings Mike to a realization, he had totally forgotten about that part of the evening, and was glad Dustin had brought it up.

So, the party moves to the living room, as Hopper moves to the kitchen. Mike listens as Hopper grumbles having to have to pick up their mess from the kitchen.

But, Mike's attention turns to El as each of their friends hands her a gift, which he can see makes El's smile grow even larger.

He loves the way that after she has unwrapped her gift from one of their friends that she moves over to them and gives them a tight smile. And it makes his heart so warm, seeing how much this all truly means to her.

And Mike waits patiently for their friends to finish with their gifts, and are settled watching a cartoon on the t.v, that Mike finally makes his move.

El is tucked up into his side when he whispers to her, "Hey, come with me for a second". And at his words, her eyes turn up to him and she gives a quick nod.

He grasps her hand and tugs for her to follow. However, as Mike moves with El, he feels a pair of eyes on him, and low and behold, Hopper is glaring at him. Mike knows exactly what he is thinking, so he gives him a look, begging the older man to trust him.

And, without any acknowledgment from the older man, Mike continues to pull El into her room, leaving the door open. He figures

that Hopper can see what they are doing, but he honestly doesn't care, this is a moment just for him and El, and if that means he has to be watched so that he can be trusted, then to hell with it.

It's dark in her room anyways, except for the low glow of her lamp in the corner, so he pulls El to her bed, guiding her to sit beside him.

"Everything okay?" El's voice is soft, and Mike just about chokes, because even in the barely lit room, he can make out every part of her face, and he's pretty sure he's never seen anyone more beautiful.

El quirks an eyebrow up at him, and he's pretty sure she's waiting for him to speak, and he opens his mouth to do so, stumbling over his words, "Oh...uhm sorry, you just...you just caught me off guard" he chuckles.

"Off guard?" she questions, and Mike swallows, "It's just...you're so beautiful" he breathes. And he knows he sees her cheeks light up as she smiles shyly, ducking her head.

He stops her though and catches her chin, turning it back up to him, "You really are El, and uhm...here!" he states as he reaches into his sweatshirts pocket, withdrawing his poorly wrapped gift pushing it towards the girl.

She eyes it carefully, taking it gingerly from him. "I wanted to give it to you, with just the two of us" he whispers as she pulls at the thread he tied around the box.

He's pretty sure he's sweating through every inch of clothing that covers him as he anxiously watches awaits for her to open the gift.

Finally, she is opening the box, and he lets out a sigh of relief when she lets out a gasp and says, "Oh..Mike, it's beautiful", as she pulls the glittering snowflake necklace from its box.

"It's to remember the snowball by, and...I thought it would look nice on you too" he admits, she's holding back tears, he can see that, she holds the necklace out to him, "Can you put it on for me?" she asks with her small voice.

He takes it with a toothy grin, "Here turn a little" he asks, and she

obeys, as he carefully moves his hand around her front and moving to clasp the necklace together behind her neck.

It settles against her chest as she turns back to him, however, her head is bent as she twiddles with the snowflake charm in her hand. And then a couple seconds later she's turning her head back up to him, "Thank you Mike" she whispers.

Mike melts "Anytime, El" he says, and then El is moving towards him, wrapping her arms around his neck, pulling him into her embrace.

"Merry Christmas, El" he says softly into her ear, and she turns and gives him another peck on his cheek, "Merry Christmas, Mike", and they remain like that for a while longer before they know they have to return to their friends.

He feels like he's walking on air when they return to the living room. And even though the room is dark, he knows each of their friends are giving them quick coy smiles, but Mike honestly doesn't care.

For, all that matters is that when he and El settle back onto the couch, is that she curls right into him, and it makes everything better.

Of course, the moment doesn't last forever like he hopes as Hopper moves into the living room, flicking on the lights, "Okay kids, it's late, I've got to get you home".

Everyone groans at this, and he can hear El give a light groan into his neck. "Come on Hop, we don't have school tomorrow, why can't we stay over?" Dustin voice perks up, and for once, Mike is happy at Dustin's loud mouth as he nods along with the rest of the gang, desperately hoping Hopper will say 'yes'.

But, alas, a firm, "No kids, not this time" comes out of Hopper's mouth slowly, and the kids sigh again. "Why not?" Mike speaks before his brain even had time to react, and he's surprised at his own boldness.

He feels Hopper's stare bore into him, as he speaks through a heavy sigh, "Look, kids, I think it would be a little weird if the chief of

police were to call all your parents and tell them they were staying over" he gives them all a look. "It'll be different once I get a cover story for El, then *maybe* we can discuss having you kids over".

And in the back of Mike's mind, he reminds himself once again, that he needs to tell Hopper he came up with one for his mom, not wanting a slip up to happen, but that's for another time, he decides.

The party all huffs about as they collect their things, and ready themselves for the outside cold, while Hopper loads their bikes and Max's skateboard into his cruiser.

Mike takes extra time packing, not wanting the night to end. He gives a look to El, who looks as if she's about to cry watching her friends pack up for the night. He opens his mouth to speak, but Hopper beats him to it, "Come on El, pile in with your friends" he sighs, and almost immediately the girl perks up with a bright smile as she rushes to the door with her friends, puts on her coat and shoes and grabs onto Mike's nearby hand as they all disappear out the door. Mike feels his heart soar as El grabs onto him, and even more so when they once again cozy up together in the front seat.

Mike sighs as El leans her head against him throughout the entire ride, as they idly chat about. Mike watches as El gives each one of her friends tight hugs goodbye as Hopper drops them off one by one.

When they pull up to his house, he feels his heart fill with ache, not wanting to leave El. They look at each other with longing looks, trying to communicate everything they want to say without saying it.

Hopper turns to face them in the back seat, "Alright kid, time to say goodnight". El heaves a heavy sigh as she nods her head, watching as Mike maneuvers out of the car.

El follows him like a lost puppy as they both stand outside the door, Mike peaks his head back in, knowing every ounce of kindness towards El's new father would hopefully help pave the way towards more frequent visits, "Thanks Hopper...for having us over", the older man nods back to him "Anytime kid, merry Christmas". "Merry Christmas" Mike returns as he shuts the back door, leaving he and El alone outside of the vehicle.

As if on instinct, their hands find each others as the silently make their way to Mike's front porch.

They stop on the stoop, awkwardly standing with each other. And Mike decides to speak first, "I hope you had a good Christmas El".

She nods wildly, "Best first Christmas, ever" she smiles brightly, and Mike is ecstatic to hear this. "I'm glad we were able see each other, and that I was able to give you your gift" he gestures to her necklace that sparkles from the porch light.

El reaches up to touch her new necklace and fiddles with it, ducking her head, but then turning her head back up to her boyfriend, "It's perfect Mike, I'm going to wear it everyday" she sighs.

Mike feels the blush that paints his cheeks and see's El's just the same. A silence falls between them, as their eyes meet one another, and he can feel that pull between them once again.

Mike knows that this is the cliché part of the movie where he supposed to give her a goodnight kiss, but he doesn't want to jinx it. However, El gives him a quick look, as her eyes flick to his lips, and he knows that she wants this just as much as she does.

So, he begins to bend down, as she moves to stand on her tiptoes, he feels her small hands rest against his chest as he moves his around her waist gently. Their eyes slip close together, and then...the gap between them closes and Mike's pretty sure he feels the world melt away as they kiss.

It's slow and innocent, but this time Mike decides to be a little bolder as he moves his lips against hers, and to his surprise, El does the same. They continue with a couple long kisses before pulling away, both with heart shaped eyes.

"Wow" is all Mike can breath as he continues to hold onto El tightly and she does the same. "Yeah, woah" she says with a toothy smile. They both make eye contact and then giggle together.

Once they settle down slightly, a lightness settles over them, and Mike feels the urge to kiss her again, so he ducks his head, and sees

El coming up to him again.

But, before they can make contact again, Mike just about jumps out of his skin when the front door to his home is yanked open, causing him to let go of El as if she were on fire.

"Oh, Mike!" his mom jumps back in surprise too as her eyes flick between him and El. He turns to look at his mom, "Mom, what are you doing?!" he cries.

She looks taken aback, "I thought I heard something, so I came to check" she said as she placed a gentle hand on her chest.

Mike lets out a long sigh, feeling the embarrassment of his mother almost catching he and El about to kiss. "*Wait!*" his brain yells as his eyes widen, "*El!*" his mind screams as he turns to look at the startled looking girl.

But, to Mike's surprise, El seems calm, as she smiles at his mother, who seems to have noticed her as well.

"Oh, and hello dear, who are you?" she asks brightly looking between El and Mike.

El moves her hand out just as Max had done earlier, and she had seen other people do it on t.v. too, so she hopes she's doing it right, "Hello, I'm El", she says in the sweetest voice she can muster.

And Mike's pretty sure his mom melts right there as she softens and moves her own hand to greet the girl, "Oh, are you Hopper's daughter?" she asks.

El nods politely, "Yes, he just adopted me" she says smoothly, and Mike can't believe how well she's playing this all out.

"Well, aren't you just the prettiest little thing, Michael, you never said how cute she was!" she coos. Mike's pretty sure he should just burst into flame at this moment, "Mom!" he yells exasperated at his mom's forwardness.

He turns to look at El, but she's just smiling and a light blush falls onto her face as well. "I'm just saying Mike!"

Mike groans and then gives his mom a look, and she backs off slightly. "Alright, well, it was nice meeting you El, I'm *sure* we will see you around soon!" and at that she moves back into the house, but not before giving Mike a wink, and he inwardly groans. As El chirps to her retreating form, "It was nice to meet you too!"

He turns back to El, "Sorry about her, I think she's just excited seeing me with a girl" he shrugs, reaching for El's hand.

El shakes her head, "It's fine Mike, I think it's cute". And Mike blushes furiously at this, "Thank you for a great Christmas El" he says, and El shakes her head, "Thank *you* for a perfect Christmas".

And with one last smile from each of them, and a quick hand squeeze, El moves down the steps, her and Mike's hand slowly breaking apart until she's on the last step, she gives him another wave, which he returns.

They don't break eye contact until she's back in the cruiser and Hopper revs the engine, and then they are gone.

Mike's young heart yearns already to be back near the girl he cried out to for three-hundred and fifty three days. But, there's something in this visit that tells him things are going to change. So, instead of being sad, he moves into his home with a smile on his face and his heart singing from their last kiss that was very different from the others.

He's about to go up to his room, until a voice stops him, "So, is El your girlfriend?" his mom's voice startles him from the kitchen.

Mike turns a surprised look to his mom who's giving him a knowing look, "Mom" he groans again. But, she just laughs, "It seems I *interrupted* something there" she sing songs.

"Mom, look she's new and..." he falls short in an explanation as his mom continues to give him *that* look.

"Mike, it's nothing to be embarrassed about, it's actually exciting!" she chirps as she places a gentle hand on his shoulder.

He sighs and gives his mother a look, knowing she's just going to

keep pressing him, "Look, we are together, but she's shy, and new and...I just don't want it paraded around yet" he sighs.

His mom squeals, "Oh, Michael your first girlfriend!" she cries as she brings him into a tight hug.

He groans as he moves away slightly from his mom as he makes his way upstairs. But before he goes his mom calls up to him, "Did you have a good Christmas, Mike?"

And Mike freezes, smiling to himself, as he turns back to his mom and says, "The best", before continuing upstairs, feeling the best he's felt in a long time.

I'm SOOOOOOOO sorry this took forever! The Mileven chapters take me so much longer because I have to go back and forth from the previous one, and I still don't get things totally lined up, but oh well, it's the best I can do!

Hope you all enjoyed this chapter and I appreciate your patience, hopefully the length makes up for the hiatus!

I'll be finishing up Stranger Tides next!

As always, PLEASE REVIEW! I love them! And thank you all for reading, you're the best!

9. The Plan (Hopper

Yes, it's been forever and a day since I've updated this story, but I really wanted to get Stranger Tides done, which I did, yay! So, now I can put my full attention into this story.

It's awesome that we've finally gotten a trailer for season 3! It looks amazing and like there will be a lot of Mileven fluff, which I was sad to not see as much of in season 2.

Anyways, I've been wracking my brain slightly as to what I'd like to do for this next chapter, but, I think I've gotten it figured out.

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Chapter 5.1: The Plan (Hopper's POV)

The snow continues to fall in sleepy flurries throughout the month of January. Keeping the forest around a cozy cabin covered in shimmering white. The cold bites even deeper as the days progress.

He finds that he hates the bitter cold that seems to have sunk into everyday. And the snow just doesn't seem to stop cascading from the grey skies above. Making traveling to and from the cabin not an easy task.

He grumbles to himself as he shuffles out into the chilled living room, like he does every morning before he heads off to work. He approaches the small fireplace that is crackling ever so lightly in the silent home. Creaking open the iron door, Hopper reaches his stiff arm to the side to grab ahold of the matching iron poker, as he thrusts it towards the charred remains of the last few logs he fed to the flames.

The pieces crumble at the touch of the poker, once rich brown pieces are now blackened and emitting a soft glow of red as they turn to ash.

Hopper grunts as he moves to the side, grabbing a couple more pieces of wood, being sure to not get a sliver stuck in his hand, as he shoves

three pieces into the stove and adjusting them just right. He then takes in a couple deep breaths and blows into the fireplace, the glowing embers ignite at the new air as small little flames burst forward and begin to lick at the new pieces of wood, igniting them as well.

Satisfied, Hopper nods his head, closes the stove, and adjusts the air flow so as to not snuff out the flame that begins to grow. With a huff, and creaking limbs Hopper rises to his feet, brushing off his hands and moves towards the kitchen to make himself a pot of coffee.

A loud yawn escapes from his lips just as he pours his first cup of the day, when a nearby door creaks open. His head moves to the new noise and his eyebrows raise as he watches El exit her room, wrapped tightly in a blanket as she approaches him, and sits down on a nearby stool.

She looks tired, so it surprises him that she is awake. "Morning" he quips to her, as he moves to take a sip of his coffee.

Instead of answering, she grumbles, wrapping the blanket around her tighter. Hopper chuckles at her, "What's wrong kid? You usually sleep in" he notes.

He watches as she shivers lightly, "It was too cold, couldn't sleep" she mutters, as her eyelids flutter from exhaustion.

His lips turn into a tight frown at her words. "Why didn't you come out to the couch? It's warmer out here?" he questions.

El lets out a heavy sigh, "It's not comfortable" she mutters, as she moves to wipe her apparently running nose.

Hopper squints at her, and he can see that she's slightly more paler than she usually is and is shivering lightly. Before he knows what he's doing, he moves a hand to her forehead, which startles her slightly.

Her dark eyes meet his in a curious look, "What..are you doing?" she asks in a low voice. Hopper pulls his hand away, shaking his head, "Nothing, you just didn't look well, I wanted to see if you had a fever, but...you are just cold" he shrugs.

"Fever?" El questions just as Hopper takes another sip from his mug. He nods while swallowing his black coffee, "Yeah, like you're sick? Your body gets all warm and you don't feel good, a fever means your body's fighting off an infection" he explains.

El nods her head slowly, not asking anymore questions, which takes Hopper back slightly, because usually after he answers one, there's usually a couple more that follow.

He bends down towards her, "You sure you're okay?" he asks again. El doesn't meet his gaze, as she slowly lifts and lowers her shoulders.

Hopper doesn't press, but he doesn't move away either, hoping she'll get the idea and answer him.

She takes the bait, sighing before speaking, "It's always cold here, and the boys and Max have a harder time getting out here in the snow, I miss them" her voice sad and defeated.

Hopper's taken aback slightly, not expecting that explanation for her answer. He moves away from her, his soft eyes still gazing at her, as she continues to stare at her lap, moving the blanket tighter against her small figure.

He sighs heavily, "Well, they were here for new years and that following weekend, and you just saw them...." his mind begins to think of the last time the group of noisy obnoxious teens were over, and nothing pops into his mind.

El flicks her head up to the man, and gives him a tight glare, "That was last time, almost a month ago" she mutters. "It's too hard for Mike and them to bike here and it's been so cold, walking doesn't work either".

Hopper listens to her explanation, it dawns on him that he has had less headaches, meaning that the teens hadn't been over much. Because after their first visit on Christmas, they had stopped by over more often than not, always following his rules.

However, looking out the window and seeing the heavy frost set on the new glass, and the piling snow that doesn't seem to stop, he can

see where El and her friends are coming from.

He drops his shoulders in defeat, "Yeah, I know kid, how about we set up a time for them to come over, I'll pick them up" he suggests taking another sip of his coffee.

El brightens up slightly, "Can...can I go over...to Mike's house?" she asks tentatively. Hopper slowly turns his head towards the girl, he quirked an eyebrow up at her.

He sets down his mug gently against the table, he gives her a look, "What gave you that idea?" he questions the girl with a knowing gaze.

El fumbles slightly with her next words, shaking her head, "What do you mean?" she says with indifference.

Hopper turns his head slightly to the side, as his lips pull up slightly, "You need to work on your lying kid, you're not very good at it" he chuckles pulling away slightly from the girl, whose mouth is now hanging open in shock.

He continues to laugh, "I'm assuming Mike asked you?" he quips at her, before reaching for his mug again, raising it to his mouth, his eyes grinning at her.

El finally lets out a long breath before she says, "Yes" in a small voice. Hopper nods at her answer, "Thought so, what gave him that idea?"

The young girl shrugs her shoulders, "His mom keeps asking about me, wants to have us over for dinner" she explains.

Hopper's pretty sure he can feel his heart tightening slightly at that idea. For, he has still been hesitating to bring her into town even though shortly after Christmas he had finally begun to share to his colleagues and other members of the town that he had adopted El, making sure to entwine some of what Mike had explained to his mother so that their stories coincided with one another.

His story was that El was his cousins kid, and she fell ill and couldn't take care of her anymore, so he took her in. Of course, Flo was more than eager to meet the new girl, but Hopper kept coming up with

meager excuses to introduce her to everyone. But, he was slowly running out, and with Karen knowing about El, it didn't take long for the whole town to be buzzing with the excitement of Hopper's new adopted daughter.

He heard the whispers, and he knew that some didn't believe his story. It seemed that the most popular twisted tale was that El was his illegitimate daughter, but didn't want to admit it, or for the town to know. However, not one story crept close to El's *true* upbringing, and he was thankful for that. He would take illegitimate daughter over a telekinetic girl who was being used as a weapon.

But, overall, it seemed that the town was excited to meet her, and were happy for his new addition to his family. So, he knew keeping her cooked up in the cabin wouldn't last too much longer.

As Hopper processed this through his head, he flicked his eyes towards the girl who sat tucked under her blanket and he could see the brimming hope written across her face.

He let out a heavy sigh, "Alright, look...I'll think about it-" and at this El sat up even straighter, and Hopper held out a hand to stop her from getting too excited, "But...I've got to think about how I want to approach this with Mike's family, they saw a picture of you before, I'm sure after getting to know you they'll figure out who you are" he gives El a narrow look.

El's shoulders sag at his words, turning to look away from him, "They won't like me" she mutters.

Hopper's a bit taken aback by this, he leans over the counter, "What do you mean?"

El tightens her lips together, "They'll think I'm a monster, or a freak" her voice is filled with sadness, and Hopper can feel his heart break sadly. He then moves around the counter, and kneels before El, resting gentle hands on her hips, she doesn't look at him.

"Hey" he says gently, trying to reassure the girl, "They won't think that, I just want them to understand who you *really* are because I believe they will accept you for everything you are, and not just

because you have powers" he explains.

El slowly moves her eyes over to Hopper, her mouth still drawn into a frown, "Kid, Mike likes you not just because of your powers, and if he cares enough to talk to you for three hundred and fifty three days and more so...then I have to believe his parents will understand".

The girl sits silently for a moment, Hopper's words processing through her mind, before she gives a slow nod, "Okay" she says in a small voice, and Hopper releases a breath he doesn't realize he's been holding.

"Alright, so, I need to think about this for a bit, and how we would do this, so give me some time, okay?" he gives the girl a look, and she in return gives him a half smile, which he returns.

He stands to his feet, his knees cracking in the process. "I've got to get going, don't get into too much trouble" Hopper moves to grab his hat, jacket and keys before he moves back to El and ruffles her ever growing hair.

She giggles at his actions, her eyes dancing lightly before he approaches the door, giving El one last wave before he leaves.

Hopper steps into the brisk cold, as the snow dances around him as he sighs, his breath clouding before him, shaking his head, and muttering to himself, "Boy..this won't be easy".

He finds himself very distracted by the thoughts of how he will be able to bring up El to Mike's parents without them freaking out, that in return he has been unable to get much work done this day.

He lets out a frustrated sigh as he rereads the same sentence of a court order, over again, and barely processes it. Hopper pushes himself back away from his desk, his chair screeching across the linoleum floor as he reaches for his pocket and withdraws a cigarette and lighter.

Pressing the cigarette to his lips, he lights it aimlessly as he takes a long pull from the stick, and exhales deeply, a cloud of toxic smoke

hanging around him.

Hopper leans back in his chair as his eyes fixate on his ceiling, his brain still reeling about what his best option was.

A knock at his office door shakes him from his thoughts as he straightens in his chair, pulling his cigarette from his mouth as he holds it between two fingers. He huffs a "Yeah" to the door, as he rubs a hand against his face.

"Hopper, Mrs. Morrison is on the phone? Can I patch her through to you?" Flo's voice rings through his door.

"Yep, go ahead" he responds as he takes another moment to think before his phone begins to ring, and just as his hand reaches for the phone, he figures out what he's going to do.

Honestly, this wasn't his first plan, nor was it in his top five ideas, however, he figured this was the best option. It was like ripping off a band-aid, he knew he had to just get it over with, but he needed to make sure there was one particular person who would be okay with it.

That's why Hopper found himself waiting outside the local middle school, smoking another cigarette as he waited for the last bell to ring.

Finally, after fifteen minutes of waiting, he heard the shrill ring of the bell, and almost immediately students began to pour from the buildings entrance.

Hopper flicked the last of his cigarette onto the ground as he stepped out of his vehicle. Almost every eye was on him as he approached the middle school. Most of the kids shrunk away out of his path, eyeing him suspiciously, some paid him no attention.

However, approaching the well known bike rack, he got the full attention of five teenagers who all look at him with wide eyes. He stops with his hands on his hips, evaluating the kids.

"Hopper, what are you doing here?" Mike asks unceremoniously

giving him a look. The older man looks down at him, returning the same look.

"Needed to talk to you" he says low. Mike turns to look at his friends who shrug their shoulders at him, and then he turns back to Hopper, "Now?" he asks.

Hopper huffs, "Obviously, why do you think I'm here?"

Mike rolls his eyes, crossing his arms over his chest, "Okay, make it quick though, I promised-" and he looks around as to make sure no one is eavesdropping on their conversation, "El-" he whispers, "I'd give her a call as soon as I got him" he explains.

It's Hopper's turn to roll his eyes, "That's why I'm here, I'm bringing you back with me, need to talk to both of you".

Mike's eyes widen at this, "Really?!" his voice jumps an octave in excitement, not seeming to care what Hopper wants to talk to him about, but having the chance to see El peaks his interest immediately.

Hopper holds up a hand to settle him, "Yes, plus...she's been moping again, figured she'd like to see ya" he shrugs his shoulders as he watches Mike smile.

"Can we come too?" Dustin's voice perks up behind Mike and Hopper fixes him with a glare, "No, it's already weird enough I'm taking Mike with me, even worse to take all of you".

The other kids let out annoyed sounds, "Hopper, when are you going to bring her out into town, people are already talking" Max pipes up with her arms folded over her chest.

Hopper gives the teens quick looks, sighing as he does so, "Look" he states firmly, "I'm working on it okay, it needs to be a slow process, and you kids have to understand that".

The group of teens cast their eyes at one another, silently communicating, as Hopper begins to wonder if they are reading each other's minds or something. Mike's the one to speak up, "Alright, we understand, it's just hard" he shrugs his shoulders.

Hopper nods at him, "I get it, the snow's been rough for you guys to come, but...I truly promise, she'll be out soon, okay?"

The teens give him sceptical looks but they eventually give exasperated nods to him.

"Good, now come on Mike, we need to get going" he motions towards his cruiser. Mike turns to his friends, "I'll see you guys later".

"Tell El, 'hi' for us" Max says hurriedly as Mike grabs onto his bike, he gives them all a brimming smile, "Don't worry, I will" and he turns once again, following Hopper towards his cruiser.

Once Mike's bike is stored safely in the back of Hopper's cruiser, both males settle into the vehicle as a pregnant silence falls on them.

Hopper barely glances at Mike as, he, fastens his seatbelt, while Hopper revs the engine to life.

The silence doesn't last long as Mike turns his attention to Hopper, "How is she?" his voice is soft and full of curiosity. Hopper rolls his eyes, turning to give Mike an incredulous look, "You're going to see her in a bit, you can ask her then".

Mike falls back into his seat, huffing turning to look out the window. The older man sneaks a glance at the kid, who has his body turned from him, he exhales slowly, clearing his throat before speaking, "She's uh...she's good, bored out of her mind" he chuckles a bit, flicking his eyes over to Mike, who turns his head slightly.

When he doesn't speak, Hopper believes that he's ignoring him, so he turns his attention back on the road. But, Mike turns his head to him, "I'm sure, you should get her a bike when summer comes" he offers.

Hopper raises an eyebrow at the teen, who gives a small secret smile, "She really liked riding with me last year, I'm not sure if my bike would fit us both anymore".

The older man nods slowly at Mike's words, "It'll be a little hard living in the woods" he says as the cruiser bumps along the road.

It's silent for a moment before Mike speaks again, "Yeah, it's going to be hard to get to see her over the summer, you guys live a ways out there" he grumbles.

Hopper refrains from growling at the kid, because, deep down he knows he's right, and it's been something that has been circulating through his mind more and more lately. Especially with the fact of how difficult it is even for himself to get in and out of the woods when the winter is especially long as this one has been.

Not just that, but his mind flickers back to this morning as he watched El exit her room, shivering from the cold. The cabin was old and the insulation was by far from being what it used to be. It also sucked with how small the place was, his room was no bigger than a closet, and he was pretty sure that the lack of personal space was one of the many reasons for his and El's blowouts.

He obviously kept this to himself, for, he had been exploring options of houses that were closer to the community, and closer for him to access if something went wrong. But, he knew El wanted to be closer to her friends, so that was something to consider as well.

The twenty minute ride to the cabin seemed longer than usual for Hopper as his and Mike's conversations dies off and they resort to looking out the window.

Hopper lets out a sigh of relief when the pull off into the forest comes into view. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Mike sit up straighter, and he can see the look of anticipation written on his face.

A small smile pulls at the corner of Hopper's mouth, knowing that his adopted daughter would be very excited to be seeing her beloved boyfriend.

His cruiser rolls to a quick stop as he cuts the engine, and no sooner does Mike whip open his door and makes a beeline towards the cabin.

Hopper opens his door, following the boy shaking his head. Mike's all but bouncing on the balls of his feet waiting for Hopper to approach the door so that he can knock.

"Go ahead kid" he nods at the cabin door as he climbs the creaking steps. And without having to be told twice, Mike moves his hand and performs the secret knock, and seconds later, the door swings open, Mike entering immediately.

Hopper follows behind, stepping into the warmer cabin. A quick look around tells him that El is still in her room, as Mike stretches his neck searching for her.

"Kid, come out here for a second, want to show you something" Hopper's booming voice rolls through the cabin. A second later, he hears a small voice echo back "Okay".

The chief of police moves to hang his coat and hat, as he looks over his shoulder, as he sees El's door open, "Dad, what's.." and before she can finish her sentence, her eyes fall on the other person in the home, her eyes going wide.

"Mike!" the young girl cries as she barrels towards the very tall teen, who is waiting with open arms as El slams into him. Her arms encircling her boyfriend, squeezing him tight.

"El, it's so good to see you!" Mike's voice is muffled by El's growing hair in which he has his head buried into.

El pulls away just enough to look up at her boyfriend, and Hopper watches with held breath as she moves her hands up to wrap around Mike's neck as she pulls him down, capturing his lips with hers.

Hopper's pretty sure he's forgotten how to breath as he watches the interaction, thinking that they would pull away after a quick peck, however, his eyes widen in shock as Mike pulls her closer.

The dad monster within him bursts from its depths, "Hey, come on now!" he growls and the two teens pull apart quickly, wide eyed and flushed faces, but still remaining in each other's arms.

His light eyes find his daughters and she gives a sheepish grin, slowly disentangling herself from Mike, but quickly finding his hand and entangling them together.

They then flick to Mike's who only gives him a small shrug and

Hopper gives them an exasperated eye roll. "I know you two are happy to see each other, but I don't need to be watching *that*" he gestures to the two of them.

"Sorry, dad" El whispers slightly, but by the way she turns to look at Mike, whose eyes are already on hers, Hopper knows she's not *that* sorry.

He moves past the two love birds, shoving Mike's shoulder lightly in passing as he moves towards the kitchen to grab a much needed beer.

El's voice perks up from the living room, "What are you doing here? Hopper usually tells me if someone is coming over".

Hopper pulls a cold beer from the fridge, twisting the top open, and taking a long pull from the beverage, his eyes landing on the teens.

Mike shrugs his shoulders, "I don't know, Hopper picked me up from school and told me he had something to talk to us about" his smile never leaves his face.

El immediately turns to Hopper, "How long can he stay?" her voice perks up. "He can stay for dinner, but I've got to talk to you two about something" he gives them each a stare.

He watches in amusement as El throws him a questioning look, however, Mike's expression falls and becomes more worried, this makes Hopper crack a smile, for he's pretty sure a million thoughts are running through the poor boys mind, and he's going to leave it for after dinner to allow him to worry.

"I'll get dinner ready, and we'll talk after, okay?" he gives the two of them a look. El brightens as she pulls on Mike's arm, "Come on, we can catch up while we wait!"

Hopper quirks an eyebrow up at the two teens, and he sees something mischievous glinting within his daughters amber eyes, and he sees Mike's red cheeks get even redder as El pulls him towards her room.

"Hold it" Hopper's voice escapes him and the two teens freeze. "Keep the door open" his eyes find El's, who rolls them dramatically.

"Dad!" she whines, throwing her free hand at her side. "You heard me" he says slowly, as he gives her a look that says, *'don't argue'*.

But, her just as quick temper flares, "What do you think is going to happen?" she throws back, and at this Mike's eyes go wide turning towards the girl, "No...El it's fine" he tries to dampen the fight.

However, El's eyes are burning through Hopper's, and a thought dawns on him, *'does she know about that stuff?'*

He truly doesn't know the answer to his own question. He can only believe the answer to be 'no', with the fact that she was raised in a lab for most of her life, and this was the first time she would be alone with a boy...her boyfriend, no less.

He lowers his head, shaking it, knowing that another very pressing talk needs to happen sooner rather than later, he thinks he might need to get Joyce involved with this one. He turns his head up and looks again at the teens.

Mike's eyes catch his and the teen gives him a soft look, and it's there that Hopper can see it written on his face, *'nothing will happen'*.

So, with one last sigh he opens his mouth to speak, "Part way open, or you'll be on the couch" he gives El a look, he can see she wants to, but her shoulders slump in defeat.

"Fine" she gives a soft whisper as she continues to pull Mike with her, as she leaves her door partly open.

He peeks through, not being able to see her bed from this angle, his heart is in his throat at this moment, but he knows that nothing *will* happen. Especially since they're literally right there and he's only a couple feet away. But, that important talk moves to the forefront of his mind, knowing it will be something to talk about.

The monster within him has Hopper peeking more often than not into El's room, as he tries to keep his moving around the kitchen as quiet as possible.

His ears are on high alert as he tries to pay attention to the voices of

the teens as they hole themselves up in El's room. His heart sighs heavily each time he hears their voices cascading through the crack of door.

'Geez, never thought this is what it would be like having a teenager', trails through his mind, as he continues to busy himself in the kitchen, his thoughts straying somewhat. Mostly to what he wants to talk to the kids about with letting Mike's parents know about El's past.

He grumbles lightly under his breath as he tries to assure himself of what he wants to say and how he wants things to go, just to be sure the teens understand the plan.

Hopper's thoughts and clanking of the dishes causes him to lapse in listening to the teens, and suddenly he stops what he's doing, and tries to listen. Only, this time he doesn't hear anything coming from El's room, and his heart rises to his throat as he quickly approaches El's bedroom. The monster within him stirring his insides, making his emotions run amuk within his brain.

But, just as he approaches the door, he hears El's small giggle, and he stops in his place. Freezing right next to her door, he peaks in ever so slightly.

It takes his eyes a second to find the two, who are sitting on El's messy bed, their backs pressed against the wall as their legs dangle off the edge, Mike's doing so much more than El's. His eyes move to their heads, which are pressed very close together, as Mike holds a comic out in front of him.

Both teens seem relaxed in each others presence, soft smiles etched on both of their faces, as El moves ever so slightly, nuzzling into Mike's neck.

Hopper watches as El stretches her hand out to point at the comic, "Who's that?" her voice is full of wonder. Mike's smile grows even more as he moves his head just enough so that he doesn't disturb El's head, "That's Jean Grey, or The Phoenix, she's really cool, she's got powers that are a lot like yours" he explains.

El's eyes go wide as she moves her head up so that she and Mike are

even closer, their eyes scanning each other's faces, "Really? Is she strong?" El quips to the boy beside her.

Mike raises his eyebrows, "She's the strongest of all the X-Men, you don't find that out till the Dark Phoenix Saga".

El nods and then turns back to the comic, Mike following her gaze, "She's pretty", her voice is soft.

Mike's head whips back over to El's, and he nudges her with her nose, "Nowhere as pretty or beautiful as you though, and you're much more badass than her when it comes to your powers", the words flow effortlessly from the boys mouth, and it stuns Hopper slightly as he continues to spy on the teens interaction.

El's head whips back towards Mike, and her eyes are wide, searching his face to see if there's any indication of whether he's lying or not, it takes her a millisecond to realize all of what Mike said is honest and true. A tear escapes her eyes.

"Mike" the girl whispers, and the boy gives her a gentle look, "You really are amazing El, and I'm lucky to be able to call you my girlfriend".

At his words, El seems even more stunned, and instead of answering, Hopper watches as El brings up her free hands and places them delicately on Mike's face, the boys eyes widening.

The telekinetic girl gently pulls at the boys face, guiding it to hers as both of their eyes flutter shut, and their lips meet in a sweet embrace.

Hopper knows, *wants*, to stop watching their interaction with one another, but as he continues to watch with his mouth wide open, he can see everything that exists between the two. He can see the love, the compassion, the eternal happiness that stretches between them.

He sees Mike move slightly as he wraps one hand behind his daughters back, and the other around her waist, they shift slightly so El moves to sit on his lap, their kiss continuing.

It's here that Hopper finally moves away from El's door, and looks away, taking a couple steps from her door, not looking back.

He can feel the monster within him growling with displeasure as he had watched his daughter pretty much start making out with her boyfriend. But, the calm rational side of his brain saw how much the boy he always worries about, treat the girl he holds in his arms.

Hopper moves back towards the kitchen, his mind reeling about *this* next step in his new daughters life. He knows limits and understandings are apart of this growing relationship. But, he now knows that this boy his daughter holds so dear will never hurt her.

So, the chief of police lets out a long harrowing breath as he returns to the dinner he left waiting to be finished as he allows the teens this moment, hoping that accepting it will only get easier as time passes.

Not too much later, Hopper finished up the dinner as he sets out plates around his and El's small rickety dining room table.

He nods to the setup before he looks over his shoulder and calls out, "Hey, kids come on out, dinners ready!"

And, without having to ask a second time, both Mike and El trek out of her room, their hands tightly squeezed together, and each sporting soft looks. He watches as they exchange small, knowing glances at one another as they approach the table.

Hopper tries desperately to refrain from rolling his eyes as he watches their interaction with one another. Mike moving quickly in front of El to pull out her seat, much to her surprise, however, once he explains that it's a 'gentleman thing to do', the girl beams brightly and sits down in her seat, as Mike sits to her left in the middle of the table.

Mike looks down at his portion of chicken, potatoes and carrots, he turns to Hopper, "This looks great, thanks Hop", the boy says earnestly, which surprises the man slightly, but he gives a small grunt of thanks in return, as they all dig into their dinner.

Most of the meal is silent, however, small talk about Mike's schooling gets brought up by El, and he's more than happy to explain everything to her. She continues to eat her meal, but is mesmerized

by his explanations, and Hopper knows that he'll have to do something to make sure El is enrolled in school by the start of next year.

Just as they wind down from the meal, Hopper pats his face and nods towards the kids. "Alright, you know I brought Mike here for a reason, so...we've got to talk about it" Hopper begins to explain as both teens eyes flick to his, each wide with worry.

He rolls his eyes at the two's reaction, "Geez, don't look at me like it's the end of the world, it's not like it's the end of the world or something", or that's what he believed anyways.

"So, what's it about then?" Mike questions looking at the older man.

Hopper clears his throat, "Well, El's told me that your mom is looking to have dinner with us?"

Mike nods slowly, "Yeah, she's been hinting at it pretty hard, she keeps asking why El doesn't come over and stuff".

"So, what have you been telling her?" Hopper asks.

Mike shrugs, "I just told her that El's new to town and has been adjusting".

Hopper huffs, " , I think we're going to have to tell your mother and father the truth" he comes out with the words with a wave of his hand, and both Mike and El's eyes widen.

"The truth?" Mike squeaks, shaking his head, "That's crazy!"

The older man scratches at his beard, "Look, if El starts coming over to your house or shes out in town or something, your mom and dad are going to realize who El is. They saw a picture of her last year, I'm sure they'll recognize her".

Mike falls back in his seat as El reaches a reassuring hand out to her boyfriend, her eyes turn to Hopper, "Do we have to?" she asks gently.

He ponders her question in his mind, and he's been over it more times than not in his head. He's seen how close Mike and El have

gotten, and no matter what happens in their lives, he knows that his daughter and her boyfriend will always have a connection, and he knows Karen and Ted aren't that oblivious.

So, he lets out a long breath before answering, "Yes, I think it's the right thing to do", and at this both kids look down at their laps, "Look, you kids want El to be out in public, and..." he pauses slightly, causing both the teens to turn their dark eyes towards him.

"And...I know you want to have a relationship" he states plainly, as both teens try to hide the blush that spreads across both of their faces.

"And if that's something you want, then I think having Mike's parents understand El and her background will make things easier for the both of you" he finishes as he gauges the teens reactions.

Both of them look towards one another, and to Hopper, it's as if they're having a silent conversation just by looking at each other's eyes. Finally, he watches Mike's mouth turn up slightly, as El nods her head.

"Okay, but...I think we'll need a game plan" Mike states, and Hopper rolls his eyes once again, "Obviously, that's why I needed you here".

Mike frowns at him, but Hopper doesn't care as he stands from his seat and moves towards his room, grabbing hold of a box and walking back out to the teens who give him a questioning look. El spots the box and her eyebrows raise to her hairline.

Hopper places the box labeled: Hawkins Lab, in front of the teens as he removes the lid. Mike stands and peers inside the box filled with numerous papers scattered about. "What's this?" the boy asks giving Hopper a look.

He can't help but smirk, "This-" he starts as he begins grabbing files from the box, "Is how your parents will understand everything they need to know about El".

Three exhausting hours later, as the sun had set in the distance many

hours before, the dark settles across the cabin.

Hopper rubs at his tired eyes as he finishes listening to Mike's part of his story he's to share with his parents. Just as the boy finishes he leans back in his chair and lets out a long yawn, in which El mimics.

"Alright" Hopper mumbles through tired breath, "Guess that's as good as it's going to get, besides it's...ten o'clock!" he roars as he looks at his wrist watch, and Mike jumps to his feet.

"Shit! My mom's going to kill me, I've got to call her!" he rushes over to the phone to start dialing his phone number, but freezes, he turns towards the chief of police, "What am I supposed to tell her, especially when I arrive home in your cruiser!" he stresses.

Hopper shakes his head, "She knows I've adopted El" he shrugs, but Mike sighs, "Doesn't matter, she'll think I did something wrong, and that's why I didn't call her, dammit!" he shouts in anger.

At this Hopper stands and takes the receiver from the shaking teen, "What's your number, I'll give her a call" he asks calmly.

Mike scrunches his face towards the man, but with another look from the chief, Mike rattles off his number, in which Hopper dials into the phone.

One ring later a frantic woman answers the phone, "Hello?!"

Hopper coughs slightly, "Uh, yes, hi Karen, this is Chief Hopper calling" he tries to stay calm.

"Chief? What are you doing calling here?"

"I'm just calling to let you know Mike is still at our house" he tries to explain.

He hears Karen let out a sigh of relief, "Well, why didn't he call to let me know where he was, I thought he might be at one of the boys house, but he usually calls", she explains.

"Heh, well I'm sorry about that Karen, you see uh-" he starts to blank as he stares back at the teens who are watching his phone call with

Karen with utmost attention.

"Uh, Mike caught me at the station and asked if he could see El, uhm, we live a ways out of town and it's not easy to get here on bike, especially with all the snow, they...they haven't seen each other for awhile and I figured it would be okay", he lies smoothly.

Karen tuts on the other line, "Well, I guess that's what happens when my little boy is in love" her attitude makes a total one-eighty, and when Hopper hears the word 'love' he almost chokes on his next words, but instead he laughs, "Oh, haha, yes, of course, you know teens" he streams along.

Karen sighs, "Oh, it's so nice to know Mike found a girl, I mean, he doesn't talk about her much, but he says she's a quiet girl".

Hopper nods on his side of the phone, "Yes, she's been adjusting, a lot of new changes".

"Mhm, yes, oh!" she says quickly, "Before I forget, I've been hounding Mike for weeks to invite you and El over for dinner, how does next weekend sound? I'd love to get to know this young lady my son has found such an interest in that he forgets to call and tell his mother where he's at" she singsongs.

Hopper can't believe how quickly she brought this subject up, and he's lucky that he's coached the kids enough to be able to pull off El's story. So, he lets out a long sigh before talking back into the receiver, "Yeah, yeah, El's talked a bit about it, we've...just been settling in, but, next week should work".

"Wonderful!" Karen cheers from the other end. "That sounds great! Will you be bringing Mike home?" her voice is joyous.

Hopper turns to look at the teens who seem tired and exhausted, and he is too, and it'll be a good hour till he's back home, so, even though with the not so pleasant thought in his mind, he speaks, "You know, I lost track of time, the kids are tired, and I had a long day too, how about Mike crashes on the couch, tomorrow's Saturday anyways, I'm sure they'll enjoy spending the day together".

At Hopper's words he watches as both the teens perk up in their seats and tune in to each other with winning smiles. And after seeing this reaction, he's pretty sure he's made a mistake.

Karen's voice brings him back to reality, "Oh...are you sure Hopper, I mean..." her voice trails off and he knows exactly what she's thinking.

"Don't worry Karen, I'll be here the whole time, and I'll have a little talk with both of them. I don't think your son wants any trouble with the chief of police" he jokes, but sends Mike a glare, knowing he heard his words.

Karen chuckles on the other end, "Okay, I'm sure they'll be fine, I mean they're young, but I guess *that talk* will need to be reiterated to Michael".

Hopper nods slowly, "Yep, same here too" he agrees.

"Well, alright then, I'll be expecting Mike home tomorrow then, thanks for looking out for him chief" Karen says.

"No worries Karen, see you tomorrow, bye" he quips, before Karen says a quick, "Bye", and he hangs up the phone.

His light eyes turn to the teens who seem a *little* too excited by his suggestion. He walks over to them and gives them a look, "Yes, it's okay for you to stay here Mike, but don't think it's going to be something regular" he gives the boy a look who nods quickly.

"Okay then, why don't you kids get ready for bed, El, you take the bathroom first" Hopper nods to the bathroom.

El pops up from her seat, "Ok" she turns to Mike with a shy smile, in which he returns, as she disappears behind the bathroom door, leaving both Mike and Hopper alone, in silence.

Hopper throws Mike a tight grin, as Mike tries to avoid his gaze, however, Hopper approaches him slowly, causing the boy to look at him.

"Chief" Mike says cautiously, "Kid" he gives him a quick look, before

moving closer to the boy.

"Look kid, I really hope I can trust you" his voice is low and firm.

Mike lets out an exasperated sigh, "Hop, we've been through this before, I won't do anything to hurt El, you know that" he raises his hands and drops them firmly.

"I know, but...I don't know if El knows anything about...ya know" he shrugs his shoulders in defeat, Mike scoffs at him.

"I'm sure she knows *something* about, 'it'" Mike bites back but cringes slightly at his choice of words.

"Kid, I honestly don't know if she knows about the 'birds and the bees', which, I'm sure you have *some* knowledge in", he gives Mike a look.

Mike rolls his eyes as he stuffs his hands into his pockets, fighting the awkwardness that hangs between the two males, "Obviously, I've had health class, and an older sister".

Hopper snorts, "Just...I know she probably understands *some* things, but...I just don't want her to think..." he stops short, and as he stops, Mike looks up at him, their eyes meet, and Hopper drops his shoulders.

Mike sighs, "I get it Hop, don't worry, I promise nothing will happen...now" he adds at the end, wincing again, which Hopper catches, making the monster within him swirl.

But, he knows where the kid is coming from. Even though both Mike and El have no idea where their relationship will be going in the future, but, if the stars align and they do stay together for years to come, they both know that there probably will be something more intimate developing between the two.

However, in this moment, Hopper has to swallow his worry and believe things will be okay.

Mike quips an eyebrow at Hopper's silence, and the chief finally shakes his head, "Just...just let me get *the talk* in at least before

anything happens" he jokes.

Mike's mouth drops open, "Trust me, nothing will happen, not for quite awhile, we're too young" he stresses, and Hopper feels relief wash through him, but he laughs all the same.

"I'm just teasing, but I guess that talk does need to come sooner rather than later" he huffs crossing his arms over his chest.

Mike laughs, "Yeah, I think it definitely does" and both males give each other small smiles, until a small voice breaks through, "Hey Mike, you can use the bathroom" El's hair is semi-wet from her shower she must have taken.

Hopper watches as Mike's face flushes slightly at the sight of his girlfriend, "Thanks El" he says quietly as he makes his way to the bathroom, the door shutting again behind him. El turns to look at the older man giving him a look.

"What?" Hopper asks innocently, but El rolls her eyes, "Dad, don't scare him" she casts a small smile over her face.

Hopper laughs at his daughter as he approaches her and gives her a tight hug, which she returns, "Don't worry kid, just having some guy talk is all".

El pulls back and gives her dad another look, in which Hopper just ruffles her hair and shoos her off to her own room to get changed.

Hopper tucks an old flat sheet blanket into the worn couch cushions as he tries to make a decent bed for his daughters boyfriend. He shutters slightly at thinking that his daughter and her boyfriend will only be sleeping a couple steps away from each other.

But, he continues to pack the old blanket into the couch and snags an old pillow from his closet and tosses that, along with another blanket for Mike to use for warmth.

Just as he tosses the pillow onto the couch, the bathroom door creaks open, and Hopper raises his head just to catch Mike's hesitant look as he pads his way into the living room.

He's wearing very baggy sweatpants that once belonged to him, while El offered up one of her own baggier graphic t-shirts for him to wear, which in turn fits him perfectly.

Hopper nods to the couch, "Okay kid, it's all yours". Mike returns his own nod, "Thanks" he says quietly as he moves towards the couch, but not before El peeks out from her own bedroom.

Hopper raises an eyebrow to the girl, "Yes?" he asks her. El gives a small shrug, "Can I say goodnight?" her voice is low and sweet.

He can't help but huff as he looks between the two teens. Shaking his head at the two, "Fine, but make it quick, and you *both* know the rules, Mike stays on the couch, El, you stay in your bedroom, alright?" he gives each of them a look.

Both teens nod aimlessly at his words as they wait for Hopper to make his way into the kitchen where he pours himself a glass of water.

He tries not to listen in, but with them only being a stone throw away, he can't help but hear their conversation.

"Goodnight El, I look forward to spending the day with you tomorrow" Mike's voice is low. El giggles at him, "I know, I can't wait!" she says brightly.

And Hopper watches out of the corner of his eye as the two move towards each other, wrapping their arms tightly around the other. El moves her head, as does Mike, and Hopper cringes once again as El pushes herself upwards towards the boy and gives him a quick, gentle kiss.

He's thankful they keep it short and sweet this time, however, he's not sure if he will ever get used to watching them do that.

"Okay kids, time to turn in" he nods to them, and they both break apart, as El slowly makes her way to her room, as Mike moves to the couch, getting himself comfortable.

Hopper stands in the kitchen for a little longer than attended, making sure his daughter doesn't make a sudden appearance outside her

bedroom.

After a couple of minutes, he decides it's been long enough as he moves towards his own room.

He leaves the wooden door mostly open, because even though he can't see out into the living room, he can at least hear.

Hopper settles himself into his own bed as he lays and listens to his surroundings. He can hear the wind blowing outside as it pushes against the worn wood of the cabin, while the trees creak back and forth.

He stays like that for awhile, listening to see if the kids will disobey him or not. However, as he tries to listen to everything and nothing around him, his eyes start to flutter close, and within minutes, he's out.

When Hopper awakens the next morning, it's with a start as the sun streams in through his bedroom window.

He coughs roughly at the dry air that invaded his lungs from the night before, as he throws his feet over his bed, groaning at the earliness.

Hopper rubs his face with his gruff hands, pushing himself from his mattress and stretching out his stiffness.

He shuffles towards the door, which creaks loudly and makes his way towards the living room to see if any harm was done.

As he approaches the living room, he can hear soft voices emanating from the room, and he decides to peak over.

It doesn't surprise him that the kids are already up, what does is the fact that they are sitting modestly on the couch, side by side, wrapped in a blanket as they watch the television before them.

He watches as the two teens cuddle up to one another, El's head placed gingerly on Mike's shoulder as his left arm is cascaded over her shoulder, pulling her close to him.

Hopper chuckles to himself at the sight as he moves towards the kitchen, as he tries to get his presence known. So, he plucks his coffee carafe from its usual spot and turns the sink on, which always makes a gurgling noise when it's first turned on in the morning. The obnoxious sound grabs the teens attention as they pull apart and look towards Hopper.

"Morning!" he gives them a bright, knowing smile, as El rolls her eyes at him, turning back towards the television.

Hopper chuckles at her reaction as he finishes filling his carafe, and sets to getting his coffee made, as he finishes, he moves towards his own single chair in the living room and sets himself down with an exhale.

"Sleep good?" he questions the boy who seems slightly nervous at Hopper's presence. The boy nods, his wild black hair moving in all directions, "Yes, couch was okay, the fire was definitely nice though" he gestures to the dying fire.

"That's good, it does get pretty cold in here at night sometimes" Hopper then moves towards the fireplace to put some more logs in to get it roaring once again.

After he's finished he moves back to the kitchen where his coffee has finished brewing, he pours himself a cup while he looks back to the teens, "What'll it be for breakfast?" he asks the two. And not even a millisecond passes before El turns excitedly towards him, "Eggo-extravaganza!?" she asks enthusiastically.

Hopper sags slightly, "Really, you're going to show your boyfriend how bad you eat?" he teases, which causes the girl to go red, "Daaad!" she groans at him, as Mike laughs.

"Well, I guess it's my fault you like them so much anyways" he jokes, as the girl gives him a slight shove, "Yes, it is your fault" she agrees with a brimming smile.

Hopper moves about the kitchen while the two chat about El's eggo obsession, as he looks into each cabinet seeing what he has available. He manages to find a stash of old candy bars, along with a can of

whipped cream in the fridge, he's relieved to see that it has yet to go past expiration.

So, he busies himself in the kitchen, preparing the eggo-extravaganza, El eagerly asked for. It doesn't take him long to put it together as he calls the teens over.

"Wow, that is impressive" Mike nods to the masterpiece. Hopper can't help but grin, "Yep, my own invention".

El sits down with wide eyes as she grabs at one of the eggos, as pieces of candy fall from it. She places it on her plate and no sooner begins to slather it in chocolate and maple syrup.

He sees Mike watching her with awe as she takes a bite of her eggo and hums at the goodness. She turns to her boyfriend, "Try it Mike, it's so good!"

"Chew with your mouth close" Hopper nods to the girl, who only rolls her eyes as she continues to munch on her eggo.

Mike soon takes his own eggo and bites into it, nodding in delight, "Yeah, that's pretty good, definitely cavity inducing" he jokes.

This stops El, "What's, cavity?" she mimics back to Mike, who chews and swallows his food before answering her question. "Oh, it's when you get like this whole in your tooth from eating too much sugar, it kind of rots away at your teeth".

El's eyes widen as she places her eggo back down at her plate, "I don't want my teeth to rot" she says worriedly. And before Hopper can jump back in to reassure her, Mike is already three steps ahead, "Don't worry El, it only happens if you don't brush your teeth or eat way too much sugar, I saw you have a tooth brush in the bathroom".

El nods at this, "Yes, Hopper makes me brush twice a day". Mike smiles at this, "Then you should be good, and it's not like you have this everyday" he gestures to the eggo mountain.

Hopper watches as El brightens from his explanation, and resumes her devouring of her eggo. He still can't believe how much trust and respect this girl has for this boy.

He watches as the kids finish up their breakfast, and without waiting a beat, El drags Mike off, as she chats about playing a game together. A smile never leaves Mike's face as he follows El.

This leaves Hopper to pick up after the sticky breakfast as the teens go off on their own.

Hopper actually finds himself enjoying the day to himself. For, El is usually so bored out of her mind she's constantly asking for him to do something with her. Today, however, with Mike at her beckon call, he is able to relax.

The teens only come to interrupt him when they are ready for lunch, and shortly after when El begs to go out into the snow with Mike.

So, Hopper throws together a couple of sandwiches and yells at them to make sure they bundle up before heading out into the snow.

It doesn't take long for him to look out the window and watch as the two teens begin to throw snowballs at one another, laughing till their faces are red.

Hopper turns his attention to the television which he settles his attention on for the next hour until the teens clomp back inside to warm up.

Once five o'clock rolls around, Hopper makes his way to El's room, where he finds the two teens laying on the rug in her floor, their legs bent back as they each take turns reading the comic Mike has spread between them.

He watches as they laugh at a particular thing one of the characters said, and once it has died down, he clears his throat. Both teens lazily throw their heads over their shoulder to acknowledge Hopper's presence.

"Hate to cut the fun, but I've got to get Mike home, it's started snowing again" the chief of police gestures to El's window, where fat white flakes float down.

El and Mike both groan at his statement, as El moves to sit on her

knees, "Can Mike stay again?" she widens her brown eyes, and gives Hopper a look that nearly wins him over, but, Mike hasn't had any clean clothes and his mother wanted him home.

With a huff Hopper shakes his head, "Not tonight kid, I promised Karen I'd have Mike home tonight, besides I'm sure he's sick of being in the same clothes".

"But-" El starts to argue but Hopper holds up a hand to stop her, "El, last night was because it was too late to bring Mike home, he'll be able to come over another time, plus you'll see him next weekend", he tries to reason.

El's face falls even more, but Mike sits up to her level as he reaches out a hand to place on top of hers, "Don't worry El, if the snow is better maybe me and a few of the other party members will come and visit you, and Hopper's right, I'll see you next weekend too".

Hopper rolls his eyes as El brightens at her boyfriend's words, "Okay" she says softly, as the two smile at one another.

"Alright, let's get going then before the snow gets any worse" Hopper states to the two teens, who slowly get to their feet and make their way towards the door.

A couple minutes later they're all riding together in the chilled cruiser, as they wait for the heat to kick in.

Mike and El chat quietly in the back seat as Hopper focuses on the road, which have become slick with the new snow. Eventually, they pull up to Mike's house.

Of course, Hopper has to cast his eyes aside as the teens exit his vehicle, as they say their goodbye.

He can somewhat hear their gushy session through the hum of his engine, as El leaves the door open.

He hears El cast one last farewell to the boy as she jumps back into the front of the cruiser, turning her body towards the window as she and Mike continue to wave at one another as Hopper pulls out of the driveway.

When the Wheeler's home is out of view, El finally turns forward, a content smile on her face. Hopper can't help but chuckle lightly to himself, feeling a little happy knowing his new daughter is happy as well.

He eventually sighs to himself knowing that he needs to make sure El is ready for the next weekend, knowing it will be a long one for sure.

Sorry the ending kind of sucked, but it was just trailing on and there will be more Mileven fluff in the next chapter obviously. I was going to fit the dinner in on this chapter, but it was getting too long and I desperately need to get a chapter out to you all!

So, let me know what you think! I love reviews as always, and the next chapter will be in Mike and El's POV, which I believe will be even cuter!

Thanks for your patience! I'll try to have the next one out soon!

10. The Plan (Mileven)

Thank you so much for the wonderful reviews as always! Glad you all enjoyed the last chapter! So, here's the Mileven chapter, which of course will be filled with fluffiness! Hope you all enjoy!

I'm so sorry this took forever to get out, and I've got a question for you all at the end, so please make sure you check it out!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Chapter 5.2: The Plan (Mileven POV)

A bitter chill runs down her spine as she snuggles deeper into her many layers of blankets. She's pretty sure that her breath would be visible if she dared to stick her face out into the open air of her room. Instead, she decided to bask in the warmth around her as she attempted to fall asleep.

However, a crackle from her bedside table draws her eyes wide open as she rolls over, ensnaring herself in her blankets even more so, as she blindly grabs for the noise making object.

"El?" she hears crackle through the device. She snatches her supercom from her bedside table, pulling it under her covers as she makes herself a small little cocoon, smiling as she presses her button to answer, "Mike, I thought you were busy tonight?"

Mike sighs through the device, "I know it's late, but I hated not calling to say goodnight" his voice is heavy with tiredness.

"I'm glad you called" her voice is soft as she tries to speak quietly, not wanting to wake Hopper from his noisy sleep.

She hears Mike let out a breath of relief from his end, "Good, I'm glad". El can feel her face flush at the tenderness behind his words.

"So, how was your family dinner with your grandparents?" El asks.

Mike scoffs, "It was okay, same as usual, gran always pinches my cheeks and gramps is always asking us to repeat what we say a

hundred times because he can't hear" he chuckles, causing El to laugh along as well.

"I'd like to meet them someday" she says gently into her device.

Mike's end falls quiet, which makes El scrunch up her face in confusion. When nothing comes from Mike's end, El speaks through her supercom, "Mike, are you still there?"

A couple seconds later he finally answers, "Yeah, sorry, it's just..." he trails off, leaving a static trail behind, as El waits patiently for him to continue. Mike let's out another long breath, "It's...it's my mom, ever since she met you on Christmas she keeps badgering me to have you over, she's just a tad bit excited her nerdy son has a beautiful girlfriend".

El beams at this, but it quickly turns into a frown, "I don't know if Hopper would let me" she states.

"Yeah, I know that's the problem, she wants to have you both over, but I have to keep coming up with excuses, I'm going to run out soon" he tries to joke.

It's El's turn to sigh, "I hope soon, I'd like to get to know your family...get out of the cabin more" her words are heavy as she rolls her eyes.

"Me too El, I'd love to show you around town".

"I'd like that too Mike...I miss you" she says holding her supercom closer as if doing so would make her boyfriend closer as well.

"I miss you too El, this stupid snow hasn't been fun to deal with" Mike says disheartenedly.

El pulls herself tighter into her blankets, "Yes, too cold" she agrees.

"Well, it's late El, I'll call you tomorrow after school, okay?"

She nods to her supercom as she answers, "Okay, goodnight Mike" she whispers gently.

"Goodnight El, sweet dreams" Mike returns, and both of their ends come to life with static. El switches her device off, and moves to set it back to it's usual resting spot.

She once again settles herself deeply into her blankets as she searches for her stuffed tiger to cuddle.

El lets out a long, tired breath as she squeezes her tiger tightly to her chest, as a wave of sadness washes over her. She can feel the burning in her chest as her eyes clench together, as she holds down a wail she desperately wants to let out.

Instead, she buries her mouth into her tiger and lets out a muffled cry into the stuffed animals striped fur. Hot tears cascade down her face, falling in gentle patters across her pajamas.

Deep within her she hates this feeling of sorrow she experiences when she feels as if she's alone, seperated from her friends and those she cares about. She opens her eyes, staring into the darkness around her.

She hates how distant she is from everyone. The separation alone drives her mad with boredom and wanting to be free.

El grips onto her sheets and stuffed animal tighter, her cries becoming soft hiccups as she tries to remain as quiet as possible, not wanting Hopper to come in and ask her what's ailing her. For, as much as she would love to be able to tell her new dad how she feels, she also has a deep sinking feeling everytime she envisions asking him about moving, so she never brings it up.

The young girl buries herself deeper as her tears continue to trail slowly down her face, as she breathes in the stuffed air around her. Eventually she succumbs to her exhaustion, and falls into a dreamless sleep.

Hopper has called her a heavy sleeper before, and of course she had asked him what he meant by those words. She can recalling him chuckling and giving her a knowing smile before he explained, "Just means you can sleep through just about anything, especially loud

noises".

So, she's surprised when the subtle sound of Hopper fumbling with the wood outside her room awakens her.

Her eyes are still somewhat swollen and puffy from her night of crying as she blink them open. Exhaustion seeps into her core as she attempts to fall back asleep, but her thoughts of the night before run through her brain as if they were a mouse on a never ending treadmill, causing sleep to allude her.

So, she lays there for a moment, the coldness from the night before still ever present in her room, which causes her to shudder. With the semi thin walls of the cabin she can hear Hopper shuffling about the cabin as he readies himself for work.

She tries to allow herself to sleep, but it never comes. With a frustrated huff she grabs one of her blankets and bundles her cold body beneath it. She throws her feet over the side of her bed, shoving her feet into the pair of slippers Hopper had gifted to her.

With slow steps, she shuffles to her bedroom door, creaking it open slowly, as the morning sun from the windows seeps in, causing her to squint.

Her eyes move upwards, catching the light eyes of her adopted fathers, his eyebrows raised in surprise as she exits her room and moves towards the kitchen.

She sits gingerly on the nearest stool, wrapping her blanket around her more tightly.

"Morning" Hopper greets her as he sips at his coffee.

Instead of answering, she grumbles, wrapping the blanket around her tighter. She listens to Hopper's deep chuckle "What's wrong kid? You usually sleep in" he notes.

Another coldness sweeps up her spine as if a cold bucket of water was just doused over her head, "It was too cold, couldn't sleep" she mutters, exaggerating the truth slightly. Although, there were many times throughout the night the cold around her aroused her from

sleep.

"Why didn't you come out to the couch? It's warmer out here?" he questions.

El lets out a heavy sigh, "It's not comfortable" she mutters, she really doesn't like sleeping on their old lumpy couch. If she dozes off there, it's one thing, but to awaken the next day feeling stiff is another, even if it is warmer. She feels a coolness begin to make it's way down her nose, she quickly wipes at it, flicking her eyes down to her fingers, making sure no blood is running. Instead, just a clear liquid sits there. She scrunches her face in disgust, as she wipes it onto her sleeve.

Then, before she knows it, a large warm hand is on her forehead. She's partially confused and slightly amused as she flicks her eyes over to Hopper, who seems to be looking at her with a bit of concern written on his face.

So, she asks him, "What..are you doing?" in a low voice. Hopper pulls his hand away, shaking his head, "Nothing, you just didn't look well, I wanted to see if you had a fever, but...you are just cold" he shrugs.

"Fever?" El questions just as Hopper takes another sip from his mug. He nods while swallowing his black coffee, "Yeah, like you're sick? Your body gets all warm and you don't feel good, a fever means your body's fighting off an infection" he explains.

El nods her head slowly, accepting the answer, not really in the mood to ask a million more questions.

She feels his presence surround her as he bends down towards her, "You sure you're okay?" he asks again. El can hear the concern woven into his words, but she doesn't meet his gaze, instead, she slowly lifts and lowers her shoulders, unsure of how she *truly* feels.

El can sense the apprehension pouring off of Hopper, she knows he wants to press more. But, instead he backs off, taking another slow sip of his coffee.

Then the tentative words drift into her mind, "*Friends don't lie*", and with an eye roll to herself she lets out a long breath before speaking,

"It's always cold here, and the boys and Max have a harder time getting out here in the snow, I miss them".

She chooses not to meet her dad's gaze, and simply focuses on her blanket, pulling it tighter to her body, a small reassurance of safety.

Hopper sighs heavily besides her, "Well, they were here for new years and that following weekend, and you just saw them...." he begins to try to cover up the lack of her friends coming over. But, she knows he's caught because in reality, she has rarely seen her friends, and it's driving her slightly crazy.

So, she flicks her head up to her dad and gives him a tight glare, "That was last time, almost a month ago" she mutters. "It's too hard for Mike and them to bike here and it's been so cold, walking doesn't work either".

When she finishes her small rant, her darker eyes examine his expressions and he processes this information through his mind. El eventually turns her head away, staring out at the frosted window. She can't help but glare at the snow that continues to fall from the dull gray sky.

After the month she spent freezing on her own, she's come to not enjoy snow that much. Especially now since it was cutting her off from her friends, and even more importantly: Mike.

When Hopper begins to speak again, she turns her attention back to him, "Yeah, I know kid, how about we set up a time for them to come over, I'll pick them up" he suggests taking another sip of his coffee.

El is startled by his words, she can feel the excitement bubbling within her, and before she can lose her nerve, she stutters out, "Can...can I go over...to Mike's house?" Hopper slowly turns his head towards her, as he gives her an inquisitive look.

She's not fond of this look her dad has given her on several occasions. She gets this weird feeling in the pit of her stomach, almost as if he has figured out her deepest secret. Her eyes follow his movements as he sets down his mug gently against the table, and he gives her a look, before saying, "What gave you that idea?"

El fumbles slightly with her next words, shaking her head, "What do you mean?" she says with indifference, trying to play it off as nothing.

Hopper turns his head slightly to the side, as his lips pull up slightly, "You need to work on your lying kid, you're not very good at it" he chuckles pulling away slightly from the El, whose mouth is now hanging open in shock.

She grits her teeth slightly, silently hating how easily he can read her.

He continues to laugh, "I'm assuming Mike asked you?" he quips at her, before reaching for his mug again, raising it to his mouth, his eyes grinning at her. She really wants to wipe it off his face.

El finally lets out a long breath before saying, "Yes" in a small voice. Hopper nods at her answer, "Thought so, what gave him that idea?"

She shrugs her shoulders, she decides to be honest with him, "His mom keeps asking about me, wants to have us over for dinner" she explains.

Her eyes continue to watch her dad's as he seems to be pulling together all of this newfound information together inside his head.

El decides to twist her soft blanket within her hands to ease her nerves. Both Hopper and Mike had talked to her about ways to cope with her anxiety. She found keeping her hands occupied was the best distraction for her.

She honestly didn't know what the big deal was for her to go over to Mike's house. To her, it seemed as if Hopper had forgotten that she had spent an entire week hiding in his basement, so she already knew the layout of the house. What was the big deal anyways?

As she continued to have a silent argument within her own mind, she finally felt Hopper's light eyes fall onto her, as her dark eyes met his. She tried to remain optimistic, holding her blanket tighter to herself, as she braced herself for Hopper's answer.

She listened as Hopper finally let out a heavy sigh, "Alright, look...I'll think about it-" and before he could even finish his statement, El felt

herself sit up straighter in her seat, her hands freezing in her lap, as her eager eyes bore into Hopper's. However, before she could get too excited Hopper held out a hand to let him finish, "But...I've got to think about how I want to approach this with Mike's family, they saw a picture of you before, I'm sure after getting to know you they'll figure out who you are" he gives El a narrow look.

She lets her shoulders sag at his words, turning to look away from him, she knows the lies that the lab workers had told Mike and his family, she immediately felt her gut twist within her. "They won't like me" she mutters.

At her words, she can feel Hopper tense from the other side of the counter, as he leans over closer to her "What do you mean?" he asks.

El tightens her lips together, thinking over her words before speaking them. She can hear the taunts and words others have called her, so she decided to use them to describe herself, "They'll think I'm a monster, or a freak" she tries to keep her voice calm and steady, but instead they are hoarse and warbly as she tries to bite back her tears.

Her eyes hold steady on her lap, as she once again grips onto her blanket, holding onto it as if it were her lifeline. Then, she feels Hopper's looming presence beside her as he kneels in front of her, turning the stool to face him, as he rests his hands gently on her hips, she stil doesn't look at him.

"Hey" he says gently, trying to get her attention "They won't think that, I just want them to understand who you *really* are because I believe they will accept you for everything you are, and not just because you have powers" he explains.

El holds onto her dads words lightly, trying to believe them, so she slowly moves her eyes over to Hopper, her mouth still drawn into a frown, "Kid, Mike likes you not just because of your powers, and if he cares enough to talk to you for three hundred and fifty three days and more so...then I have to believe his parents will understand".

She can't help but feel her heartbeat a little bit faster at the mention of Mike's dedication to her from the last year as he desperately tried to find her. She feels herself warm slightly as Hopper's words process

through her mind, before she gives a slow nod, "Okay" she says in a small voice, a slight smile creeping onto her face.

Hopper relaxes in front of her before he speaks again, "Alright, so, I need to think about this for a bit, and how we would do this, so give me some time, okay?" he gives her a look, and she gives a half-smile in return.

Her eyes follow Hopper as he stands before her, she hears his knees crack in the process, "I've got to get going, don't get into too much trouble" Hopper moves to grab his hat, jacket and keys before he moves back to El and ruffles her ever growing hair.

She giggles at his actions, her eyes dancing lightly before he approaches the door, giving El one last wave before he leaves.

El watches him leave as she once again pulls her blanket close around her. She heaves a heavy sigh as she stands slowly, moving towards the kitchen where she knows a box of Eggo sits in their freezer.

Once she has her breakfast ready she moves towards the living room, where she flicks on the television with her mind, as she settles into another uneventful day.

He's found himself having a difficult time paying attention in class anymore. Even more so with the fact that he knows the girl who tends to preoccupy his mind on a minute basis, is home alone stuck in a cabin.

His mind drifts to the moments they've been able to share together within the last couple of months, although not much, which he hates.

He turns his attention to the windows that are to his left, settling his chin onto his hands as he stares at the dreaded snow falling from the sky.

His eyes scrunch as he watches with disdain as the white fluffy snow dances down to the already snow covered ground.

Usually, Mike has no problem with the winter, for he and his friends always find ways to enjoy the cold, white powder in as many ways as

possible. But, now it taunts him. It's as if this year Hawkins decided to accumulate the most snow it has ever seen in years.

Now, with the large accumulation of snow, it made getting to the cabin impossible, and walking there wasn't an option either, not unless he and the others wanted to freeze on their way there.

He absolutely hated it in every way, and if he could he would scream, but being in class kept him from doing so. Instead he glared at the snow, with the most heated intensity he could give it, personally hoping that in some weird way, he could make it disappear, and then he could finally get to the cabin to see El.

"Mr. Wheeler!" Mike nearly jumps out of his seat as a rough hand slaps down onto his desk, pulling him from his thoughts.

"Ah! Yes, Ms. Conti" Mike sputters out as he turns to face his century old english teacher, who is now glaring at him with disdain.

"Unless you have found something that relates to Shakespeare outside, I implore you to get out of that head of yours and pay attention!" the old woman wags her finger an inch away from Mike's face.

Mike can't help but sputter before he answers, "Uhm...uh yes Ms. Conti...sorry" he mutters, trying to avoid the women's steely glare but failing miserably.

She gives him one last look before she 'humphs' and turns back to the front of the class, continuing her long winded explanation on Shakespeare's, Hamlet.

Mike let's out a breath he's been holding as he gingerly lifts his head to look around, he finds just about every single one of his classmates are giving him teasing smiles, as they try to hold back their laughter, before returning their attention back to Ms. Conti. Max, Lucas and Dustin all give him questioning looks, and then return their attention to the front of the classroom too.

He can feel his face light up in embarrassment, and all but one pair of eyes leave him. Will, who is seated one row ahead of him in the

adjoining line of desks, he gives Mike a worried look.

Will mouths, "You okay?", and Mike just gives him a slow nod before he slinks back into his seat, hoping his desk swallows him whole.

Finally, the last bell of the day rings throughout the school, and Mike can't be more grateful for the sound, as he swings his backpack onto his shoulders and makes a beeline for the exit.

"Mike, hey Mike, wait up!" Mike turns his head slightly towards the sound, seeing that Dustin is frantically waving at him while Will, Max and Lucas trail behind. He shakes his head causing his shaggy black hair to fly about as he continues forward, not really wanting to hear what his friends have to say, but knowing they will pester him no matter what.

He swings open the back door and trumps down the steps towards his bike. He can hear his friends footsteps thumping behind him.

Finally a hand around his arm stops him, "Mike! Dude, I've been calling you since class ended!" Dustin swings Mike towards him. Mike huffs, rolling his eyes, "What is it Dustin!?" he says diegetically.

Dustin holds up his hands in defense, "Nothing, you just seemed totally out of it in class" he shrugs his shoulders.

"Yeah, Wheeler, I've never seen you so out of it" Max adds in, as she pulls her winter coat tighter around her.

Mike turns to look at all of his friends, giving them heated looks, he huffs, "It's nothing, I was just...distracted" he tries to shrug them off as he unlocks his bike from the rack.

He begins to pull his bike out, when Lucas places a firm hand on Mike's bike seat. Mike throws him a glare. "Mike, seriously, is everything okay?" he asks softly.

And now each of his friends are giving him worried looks, and Mike drops his shoulders lightly.

He looks away from the slightly as he grips and un-grips his cold

handlebars, he lets out a breath, as it clouds in front of him. He turns back to his group of friends, and decides to speak, "I was just thinking about all this stupid snow".

At this Dustin scoffs, "So, you were totally zoned out almost all of class because it's snowing?" Mike glares at his friend, who stops his laughter at the look.

"It's not *just* the snow...it's the fact it's been too cold to walk out to the cabin, and let alone get my bike through the snow" he explains.

His friends all give slow nods of understanding.

"You miss El", Max raises an eyebrow at the boy, a hint of teasing laced in her words. Mike looks down, answering her question, his face begins to warm.

A gentle hand rests on his shoulder, causing him to turn towards his friend of reason, "We miss her too" Will says softly, and Mike gives him a tight smile.

"I know...it's been hard" Mike states slowly, as he begins to pick at a piece of leather on his handlebar that has begun to peel off. He notices his friends have gone quiet and looks up at them.

Their eyes are wide as they look off into the distance. Mike scrunches his face in confusion as he turns to see what they're looking at. And, seconds later, his own eyes widen as he watches as a uniformed man approaches them.

A swirl of emotions go through him, annoyance, anger, worry, he's not exactly sure where they land, but as Hopper stops in front of them, it seems his mouth beats him to his decision.

"Hopper, what are you doing here?" Mike asks unceremoniously giving him a look. The older man looks down at him, returning the same look.

"Needed to talk to you" he says low. This takes Mike back by surprise, because for the time he has known the chief, he has *never* asked him to talk. So, Mike turns to look at his friends who shrug their shoulders at him, and then he turns back to Hopper, "Now?" he asks.

Hopper huffs, "Obviously, why do you think I'm here?"

Mike rolls his eyes, crossing his arms over his chest, "Okay, make it quick though, I promised-" and he looks around as to make sure no one is eavesdropping on their conversation, "El-" he whispers, "I'd give her a call as soon as I got him" he explains.

He watches as Hopper rolls his eyes at him, "That's why I'm here, I'm bringing you back with me, need to talk to both of you".

Mike's eyes widen at this, "Really?!" his voice jumps an octave in excitement, he really can't believe that after worrying about her, and not seeing her for so long, it seems totally out of the blue that Hopper now wants to talk to him. And not only that, but actually take him to see his girlfriend, his heart soars.

Hopper holds up a hand to settle him, "Yes, plus...she's been moping again, figured she'd like to see ya" he shrugs his shoulders. Mike can't help but smile brightly at hearing this, El misses him just as much as he does, his excitement grows.

"Can we come too?" Dustin's voice perks up behind Mike, who turns to look at him. And some of his excitement dwindles slightly, for even though he enjoys spending time with all of his friends, having alone time with El is much more enticing. Hopper however fixes the hat wearing boy with a glare, "No, it's already weird enough I'm taking Mike with me, even worse to take all of you".

Mike sighs inwardly to himself, because thankfully, in this situation, Hopper has control, and he doesn't mind it in this moment.

His friends let out sighs of disappointment, "Hopper, when are you going to bring her out into town, people are already talking" Max pipes up with her arms folded over her chest. Max's words actually peak Mike's interest as he too turns and looks at the man with a questioning look.

Hopper gives the teens quick looks, sighing as he does so, "Look" he states firmly, "I'm working on it okay, it needs to be a slow process, and you kids have to understand that".

The group of teens cast their eyes at one another, silently communicating, as Hopper begins to wonder if they are reading each other's minds or something. Mike turns back to him, speaking up, "Alright, we understand, it's just hard" he shrugs his shoulders.

Hopper nods at him, "I get it, the snow's been rough for you guys to come to the cabin, but...I truly promise, she'll be out soon, okay?"

The teens give him sceptical looks but they eventually give exasperated nods to him.

"Good, now come on Mike, we need to get going" he motions towards his cruiser. Mike turns to his friends, "I'll see you guys later".

"Tell El, 'hi' for us" Max says hurriedly as Mike grabs onto his bike, he gives them all a brimming smile, "Don't worry, I will" and he turns once again, following Hopper towards his cruiser, his heart brimming with joy, for in a handful of minutes, he would get to see a very special girl.

Once Mike's bike is stored safely in the back of Hopper's cruiser, both males settle into the vehicle as a pregnant silence falls on them.

Mike's nerves heighten slightly, for the last time the two males were alone together, Mike was forcefully pounding into him calling him a 'stupid, disgusting, liar'. So, he decides to sit stagnant in his seat, turning his attention forward as Hopper revved his cruiser's engine to life and they take off down the road.

Hopper remains silent as they cruise along. And a million questions swarm into Mike's head, making it difficult for him to remain quiet. He bites his lip, holding onto his question, but his curiosity and the awkwardness of them riding along together makes him speak, "How is she?" his voice is soft and full of curiosity. Hopper turns to Mike and gives him an incredulous look, "You're going to see her in a bit, you can ask her then".

Mike falls back into his seat, huffing turning to look out the window. '*Geez, I was just asking*' runs through his head as they continue to roll along. He decides to keep his mouth shut until they reach the cabin,

figuring he and El will have enough time to talk and catch up.

Just as he begins to trail off into his own thoughts, Mike hears Hopper clearing his throat, he turns his attention towards the older man, who opens his mouth to speak, "She's uh...she's good, bored out of her mind" he chuckles a bit, flicking his eyes over to Mike, who turns his head slightly towards him, his eyebrow raising in surprise as he answers his previous question.

However, Mike decides to not answer just yet, feeling a bit annoyed at the man. But, after some processing, he turns his head slightly to Hopper, "I'm sure, you should get her a bike when summer comes" he offers.

Honestly, it's something Mike's been eagerly awaiting for once the snow melted. True, he loved the way El rode on the back of his bike during their week together, as she held onto him tightly from behind, it's something that always made a thrill run up his spine when he thought about it. But, truth be told, he was slowly outgrowing his current bike, and he knew they wouldn't be able to ride around together on his bike forever. But, being able to teach her, and ride around with her through town was still exciting enough for him.

Mike decides to voice this as he gives a small secret smile, "She really liked riding with me last year, I'm not sure if my bike would fit us both anymore" he chuckles.

The older man nods slowly at Mike's words, "It'll be a little hard living in the woods" he says as the cruiser bumps along the road.

It's silent for a moment before Mike speaks again, "Yeah, it's going to be hard to get to see her over the summer, you guys live a ways out there" he grumbles. Knowing that deep down, even though warmer weather and lack of snow meant easy traveling to the cabin, didn't mean that it didn't take a long time to get there, especially on bike, making visits to the cabin just as difficult.

Hopper doesn't respond to his last words, so another silence falls upon them as they continue their drive to the cabin.

Finally, after what seems like an eternity to Mike, he notes the

familiar pull off to the cabin come into view, so he sits up straighter in his seat, his excitement growing even more so.

The cruiser rolls to a quick stop as Hopper cuts the engine, and no sooner does the car stop, does Mike whip open his door and makes a beeline towards the cabin, the anticipation reaching its boiling point.

As he pounds up the creaking steps, he notices that even though Hopper is taking his sweet time to get to the cabin, Mike's annoyance doesn't grow.

Once Hopper begins to climb the steps he nods his head at the cabin door and says, "Go ahead kid". And without having to be told twice, Mike moves his hand and performs the secret knock, and seconds later, the door swings open, Mike entering immediately, his heart racing.

Hopper follows behind, but Mike is barely paying attention as he stretches his neck searching for El, but not seeing her in the general vicinity.

"Kid, come out here for a second, want to show you something" Hopper's booming voice rolls through the cabin, startling Mike slightly, but then a second later, he hears a small, sweet voice echo back "Okay".

Mike's pretty sure that his heart is in his throat as he watches El's bedroom door creak open, and he can't help but smile brilliantly as he watches his girlfriend walk out, she begins to speak "Dad, what's.." and before she can finish her sentence, her rich brown eyes meet his.

And before he can react, El's mouth turns into a beaming smile, as her eyes sparkle, and she takes off at lightning speed towards him crying, "Mike!"

Mike's thankful for his body to know what's to come next as he automatically raises his arms, just in time for El's small body to slam into him. Her arms encircling him, squeezing tightly.

"El, it's so good to see you!" Mike's voice is muffled by El's growing hair in which he buries his head into, taking in her scent.

El pulls away just enough to look up at him, and Mike can feel the electricity sparking between them, as they gaze into each others eyes. And before he can utter another word, he watches in wonder as a determined look crosses El's face, and he feels her move her hands to wrap around his neck as she pulls him down, capturing his lips with hers.

Mike's startled by the quickness of her actions, for he's usually the one who initiates their kisses, but feeling her pressed close to him, and their lips connecting with one another, he *really* doesn't care.

And, without thinking, knowing his mind is drifting to other thoughts, he pulls El a little closer to him, their lips shifting slightly, something that neither of them have experienced. And he silently hopes that the thrill that runs up his spine, is exactly how El feels.

He's about to shift once again, not wanting the moment to end, but a gruff voice pulls him back into reality. "Hey, come on now!" Hopper growls at them, and Mike pulls away from El quickly, totally forgetting where they were. He still holds El close though, not wanting her out of his grips.

Mike's pretty sure Hopper is about to lunge at him, but Mike watches as his light eyes move to El. And he feels her slowly disentangle herself from him, she gives Mike a soft, knowing look.

He finally has enough courage to look at Hopper, who mostly seems annoyed now, so Mike gives him a small shrug and Hopper gives them an exasperated eye roll. "I know you two are happy to see each other, but I don't need to be watching *that*" he gestures to the two of them.

"Sorry, dad" El whispers slightly, casting her lovely eyes to meet Mike's once again, and it's all he can do to not lean in and kiss her again.

But, Hopper moves past them, shoving Mike's shoulder lightly in passing as he moves towards the kitchen.

El's voice pulls his attention directly towards her "What are you doing here? Hopper usually tells me if someone is coming over".

Mike lets out a breath, but still holds his smile, "I don't know, Hopper picked me up from school and told me he had something to talk to us about".

El immediately turns to Hopper, "How long can he stay?" her voice perks up. "He can stay for dinner, but I've got to talk to you two about something" he gives them each a stare.

Mike feels his heart plummet to his stomach, as a million fears begin to string through his mind. He unconsciously squeezes El's hand in his, as he's pretty sure that Hopper's going to tell them some devastating news like they're going to have to move away or something.

As if Hopper can sense his worry, the older man finally cracks a smile, and Mike feels himself relaxing a bit. But, Hopper doesn't explain anymore but instead says, "I'll get dinner ready, and we'll talk after, okay?" he gives the two of them a look.

El brightens as she pulls on Mike's arm, "Come on, we can catch up while we wait!"

Mike catches his girlfriends eyes, seeing a mischievous glint there, and he feels his stomach erupt with butterflies, and even more so when she begins to pull him towards her room.

"Hold it" Hopper's voice cuts through their excitement, both he and El freezing before Hopper continues, "Keep the door open".

El huffs beside him as she whines "Dad!" throwing her free hand at her side. "You heard me" he says slowly, as he gives her a look that says, '*don't argue*'.

And just as Mike expected from his spit-fire of a girlfriend she bites back with, "What do you think is going to happen?"

Mike chokes on his own spit, his eyes going wide, knowing that she probably doesn't understand what she just said. So, he quickly turns towards her, "No...El it's fine" he tries to dampen the fight.

However, El's eyes don't leave Hopper's. Which causes Mike to panic slightly. He *just* got there and he doesn't want to leave because of

some little disagreement.

Mike watches with wide eyes as Hopper lowers his head, shaking it, and then he very slowly turns his head up and looks again at them with strict eyes.

Mike's eyes catch his and he tries to convey a look to Hopper that says, '*nothing will happen*'. In which he will be very diligent about following. He knows deep down that overtime, if things continue to go the way they have been for he and El, that in time, obviously things will change. But, even though he is a hormonal teenage boy, he wouldn't even think of trying *anything* with El, especially not until she understood the basics of puberty, hormones and such.

He waits tentatively with El squeezing onto his arm before Hopper lets out a long sigh, pointing at El's room, "Part way open, or you'll be on the couch" he gives El a look.

Mike silently hopes that this will make his girlfriend feel better, for a partial open door was fine in his books.

Finally, El whispers "Fine", and a millisecond late Mike feels El pull him into her room, leaving the door partially open.

He's pretty sure he can feel his heart in his throat as El begins to shut her door, as he stands awkwardly in the center of her room, his hands at his sides, unsure what to do next.

Honestly, he has no idea *why* he feels so nervous. It's not like they've never been alone together, they had been many times when she was hiding out in his house.

However, the second El turns around, her curly hair bouncing as she does so, his eyes catch her small, secret smile, and soft glint in her eyes. The way she looks at him is different then usual, and it has been the moment they were officially *together*.

'*Oh, that's why*', trails through his mind as El walks up to him slowly, their eyes meeting as he looks down at her and she looks up. She gently lays her right hand on his shoulder, while the other rests against his chest.

"Hi" she whispers with a sweet smirk. And it's all Mike can do to not melt on the spot, as he gives her a gushing smile in return as he delicately places his hands on her hips, as he returns a quiet "Hi" in return.

Then, she's moving towards him, standing on her tiptoes to reach him, as he bends down and meets her in the middle, interlocking their lips in a sweet kiss.

She couldn't believe her luck of all days when she saw Mike standing in their doorway. It had only taken her brain about two seconds to register that he was actually here, and the first thing she wanted to do was to run into his arms. So, that's what she did.

She surprised herself even more when Mike had pulled away from their embrace, and the moment she saw his dark eyes boring into hers, she had to show him how much she had missed him.

So, with a rush of determination, she had reached up and pulled Mike down into a kiss. And, just like every other time their lips met, it sent the same shrill of excitement up her spine. She was expecting to kiss to be short and sweet, like usual. But then Mike had moved his head, causing his lips to move in such a way that thrilled her even more, especially when he pulled her tighter against him.

El could have stayed there forever if it wasn't for her dad to bark at them to practically knock it off. Honestly, she had forgotten he was there, and was slightly embarrassed to show her boyfriend that much affection with him present. But, there was also a part of herself that didn't care. She hadn't seen her boy in a long time, they deserved that moment together.

When Hopper announced that he would be staying for dinner, she became even more excited and was eager to have him alone to just talk and be together.

But then, Hopper became testy with the fact that they would be in her bedroom....alone. And she *really* didn't understand *why* this was such a big deal?

For, she had spent a week with Mike, living in his home, and there were *many* times that found them alone. So, the first question popped into her mind to throw at her new dad, "What do you think is going to happen?"

And as if she had asked the wrong question entirely, it seemed that Mike and Hopper both became alarmed, as Mike tried to veer her off, and calm her down slightly. While Hopper seemed to be milling over a bigger idea in his head.

After what seemed like an eternity, Hopper finally agreed to let Mike into her room, if the door was part way open. Begrudgingly, she agreed to this, and continued to pull her boyfriend into her room, closing the door part way, before turning around to meet her Mike's wide eyes.

She couldn't help but give him a soft smile as she approached him. This was their first time alone since he had pulled her away at the dance, and it felt different somehow.

But, even with the different atmosphere hanging about them, she knew she wanted to be close to him, so that's what she did. And now they are once again sharing a delicate kiss, as they hold each other close.

El pulls away slowly, leaving her boyfriend flushed, which she has come to enjoy, she smiles brightly up at him, "It's wonderful that you're here" she whispers.

She watches as her boyfriend displays her a dopey smile, "Yeah, it's awesome".

El moves to pull Mike towards her bed to sit, she feels him stiffen beside him, so she turns her head and gives him a questioning look.

"Mike, what's wrong?" she asks innocently.

Mike's mouth moves, but only garbled sound comes out. Eventually he takes in a deep breath, "It's just...uhm..." he starts but doesn't finish, instead gesturing towards her bed.

El follows his movements and quirks an eyebrow up at him, "Yes,

that's my bed, I thought it would be more comfortable to sit on then the floor".

Mike lets out a sigh, a relieved smile following suit, "Oh, okay", he whispers as El gestures for him to sit on the edge of her bed, while she places herself beside him.

She doesn't let the weirdness slide though, "Why are you acting weird?"

Her boyfriend shuffles awkwardly, looking at her, but not meeting her gaze.

Instead, she watches as he shakes his head, his shaggy hair flopping from side to side, before he gives her an unconvincing look, "Uhm...nothing, nothing's wrong", he tries to place a fake smile on his face, but El doesn't fall for it.

So, El reaches out a soft hand and places it over Mike's, his smile flips suddenly, as he stares at her. She gives him a tender look before she repeats her famous line, "Mike, friends, don't lie".

At this, Mike lets out a long harrowing breath, just like he did before he explained what 'more than friends' meant, last year in the cafeteria. El can't help but smile at the quick memory, as she waits for her boyfriend to pull himself together.

He squeezes her hand with his, she waits before he raises his head, and meets her eyes. "It's...it's not easy to explain...and it's just a weird conversation to have", his shoulders sag.

"Why?" El can't help but ask. Even though she had grown accustomed to understanding emotions, feelings and normal human interaction, she found the 'embarrassing' one's the hardest to get out of her friends and even Hopper sometimes.

Mike winces at her words, almost as if he was afraid she was going to ask it. He rubs at her hand gently, before he shrugs his shoulders and speaks again, "The thing is...you know how we're together, like boyfriend and girlfriend?" he asks her.

El nods gently at this, and gives Mike a soft smile, enjoying him

saying those words to her. Mike hesitates slightly before he speaks again, "So, usually with being boyfriend and girlfriend" he lamely gestures between the two of them. "There's *stuff* that tends to happens as a relationship grows".

She gives him a questioning look, and she evaluates how Mike seems to be ready for her next question, "What stuff?" and with another grimace, Mike let's out another long breath as he runs his free hand anxiously through his curly locks.

"Uhhh..." he fumbles, before shifting slightly in his seat, "You, uhm, you know how we kiss..and stuff?"

El smiles brightly at this and whispers a "Yes". Mike takes in a deep breath beside her, "So, after people have been boyfriend, girlfriend, *for a long while*", he exaggerates, "Uhm, sometimes they do things that become more intimate, like, kissing longer, uh...exploring new things".

El opens her mouth to speak her next question, but Mike holds up his hand to stop her, "El, I know you have a lot of questions about this, but I'm not sure if I should explain them all to you, maybe Hopper or Joyce should" he admits weakly.

She frowns at his words, and Mike jumps forward to take both of her hands in his, "No, El, please don't take it the wrong way, it's just there's *so much*, to this other stuff, and I don't know everything about the female...stuff...it's hard to explain" he sputters.

El examines Mike's words, and sees the deep pleading within his eyes that are practically begging her to just accept what he's saying, and move on from there. She still feels the bubbling sensation within her to ask the million questions that are swimming through her head. But, Mike was honest with her, there are things that he doesn't understand, but there are people she can ask.

So, instead of bombarding her poor boyfriend with more questions, she decides to relax her shoulders and give him a warm smile. She squeezes his hands, "Okay, I'll ask Joyce or Hopper".

Mike instantly relaxes at her declaration, giving her a relieved smile.

"Thanks El, I promise, once you learn more, it'll be easier to talk about, okay?" he gives her a promising look, and she nods in return.

El pulls at the boys hand, gesturing for him to sit back on the bed with her, he stops slightly, and she frowns again, afraid she's pushed him again.

But, before she gets too worried, Mike holds up a hand, "Wait, let me grab my bag, I've been wanting to show you this comic for a while" his face lighting up excitedly as he paws around through his bag, seconds later he pulls out a small book.

He holds it up to her, and she tilts her head as she takes in the cover of the comic. A woman is standing with her hair blowing upwards, while a fiery aura surrounds her. People in strange costumes surround her either looking scared or worried. Her eyes catch the large words written in bold letters across the front, she reads them aloud, "X, men?" she sounds the unfamiliar word out, and Mike nods wildly as he approaches her and sits on the bed, causing her to sink towards him.

"Yeah! It's an awesome serious to start with, do you want to read it?" his voice is slightly hesitant.

El's eyes widen in wonder, as she nods her head furiously, "Yes, let's read it!" she says excitedly as El move to pull herself back further onto the bed, her back resting against her wooden wall, while her legs stretch out before her, slightly dangling off the side of the bed.

Mike hesitates, but without a word, El moves out her arm, and pats the seat beside her, without any more questions or hesitation, Mike moves so that he is mirroring her. His legs, of course, dangle further off the bed, causing El to laugh.

Mike chuckles too, "Yeah, I went through quite a growth spurt" he shrugs his shoulder, as El continues to giggle beside him, "That's okay, I like that your tall" she comments, as she watches her boyfriend blush.

He pulls the comic book up between them, and flips open the first page. El listens as Mike clears his throat, and jumps into the

beginning of the story. El smiles brightly as Mike gives each of the characters a different voice, and she buries her head into his shoulder every time he changes his low voice into a high pitched one to match the girl he is trying to portray. She couldn't find herself anymore happier.

Mike didn't think he'd ever be able to calm his rapidly beating heart within his chest, as the girl beside him giggled at the voices he'd make for each of the characters. Her happiness oozed from her, and he felt himself catch it quite easily.

He never did this with his friend's. If they chose to spend the afternoon reading comics, then it was done so usually in his basement, each of them cozied up somewhere, silently reading to themselves.

But, he found that he enjoyed this even more so, especially since his favorite person in the world was cozied up next to him, as she nuzzles herself deeper into his neck. He's pretty sure he'd pass out if he wasn't reading.

He continues to read on for quite awhile, digging deeper into the comic, when El stops him while she points at a particular character, "Who's that?" her voice is full of wonder. Mike's smile grows even more as he moves his head just enough so that he doesn't disturb El's head, "That's Jean Grey, or The Phoenix, she's really cool, she's got powers that are a lot like yours" he explains.

El's eyes go wide as she moves her head up so that she and Mike are even closer, their eyes scanning each other's faces, "Really? Is she strong?" El quips to the boy beside her.

Mike raises his eyebrows, "She's the strongest of all the X-Men, you don't find that out till the Dark Phoenix Saga".

El nods and then turns back to the comic, Mike following her gaze, "She's pretty", her voice is soft.

Mike's head whips back over to El's, he can see it in her face the look of longing. He had brought over an earlier version of the X-men

comics, and just like always, Jean is skinny, has long flowing red hair, and is dressed in a tight outfit. He never really paid much attention to how comic book characters were always overly exaggerated in books, he knew realistically, most girls didn't look like her or the other heroine's in his favorite comic book series.

He never really paid much attention to girls, yes, some girls in her class had caught his eye here and there, but crushes never developed for him. Mike felt he spent so much time with his friends in nerd world, that he never expected any girl to even look his way.

But, that night he had met El, it changed everything. Especially since she was not the typical girl, for, her short hair had caught him off guard at first, and her premature understanding of the world was very different.

However, the way she took everything in, her quiet affect, and beautiful brown eyes changed him. Not only that, but deep down he knew how much of a badass she was and how deeply she cared about those close to her.

That's what pulled Mike in, and he fell hard, it was nothing he had ever expected to happen, especially since they had only known each other for a couple of days. But, the natural pull between them was too much, and he knew she felt it too.

So, as he turns his head towards his girlfriend who is giving this girl a longing look he can't help but lean down and nudge her with his nose, "Nowhere as pretty or beautiful as you though, and you're much more badass than her when it comes to your powers", the words flow effortlessly from the his mouth.

El's head whips back towards him, her eyes are wide, searching his face to see if there's any indication of whether he's lying or not, he can see it within her expression. But, it only takes her a millisecond to realize all of what he said is honest and true. And it absolutely was, he believed everything about her was beautiful, and she deserved to know it.

He watches as a small tear escapes her eye.

"Mike" El whispers, her mouth opens again to speak, but nothing comes out, so he gives her a gentle look, "You really are amazing El, and I'm lucky to be able to call you my girlfriend".

At his words, El seems even more stunned, and instead of answering, Mike is slightly surprised when El brings up her free hands and places them delicately on Mike's face, his eyes widen at her movements.

He's not exactly sure what his telekinetic girlfriend is doing, as their eyes roam the others faces. But ever so gently, she pulls at his face, guiding it to hers, he can feel his eyes fluttering shut, knowing what's about to happen, and seconds later their lips meet in a sweet embrace.

The kiss starts off as a gentle caress between their lips, but Mike can feel a different tension, as he feels El pull back slightly, their lips hovering over the others with only a millimeter separating them. Their eyes are heavily hooded as they look at each other.

Mike moves slightly bringing their lips together once again as he wraps one hand behind El's back as her moves the other around her waist, they shift slightly, like it's happened a million times before, as El moves to sit on his lap, their kiss continuing, deepening, their innocence disappearing slightly.

It's nothing like he had ever experienced before, holding El, his gorgeous girlfriend in his arms, as they share a tender embrace, melting into one another.

He never believed this is where they would be after only dating for such a short time, but the intensity and love between them is hard to ignore. He has to hold back a slight groan from the back of his throat as El moves to run her hand up through his hair, a feeling that takes his breath away.

They experiment as their lips pull apart, they shift their heads, and reconnect once again. Holding longer and longer kisses , until the need for air makes them separate. Both breathing heavily, catching their breaths.

Mike can't help but chuckle as he rests his head against El's forehead.

He hears her scoff slightly, "What are you laughing about?" she asks as she rubs her nose against his.

He laughs, "Because this is what I was talking about before" he admits.

El pulls away slightly, giving him an interesting look, so Mike reaches forward and cups her face in his hands gently, "We were, uhm...practically making out, that's what Hopper is afraid of, because it can lead to...more".

He watches in amusement as El shakes her head and giggles, "But, it's just a longer kiss" she exasperates, waving her hands about.

"Yeah, but you're on my lap, and...yeah...that's more of a Joyce question" he admits with a red face. He hadn't paid much attention to it before, but having El so intimately so close to him was starting to have his thoughts go down a different road. However, the massive warning lights that flashed in his head, restrained him from spiraling too far.

And, thankfully El moves so that she is off Mike's lap and moves to tuck herself up into his side, placing one of her hands on his chest and sighing, "This stuff is so confusing".

Mike laughs at this while he places a gentle kiss on the girl's head, "Oh I know, trust me once you learn it all, it doesn't get any easier from there" he admits.

This causes El to sigh even more so, "Can we keep reading, I really like this book".

Mike shifts to grab the comic, "Yeah of course, Hopper hasn't called us yet", he begins to settle onto El's bed, opening up to the page they left off on, but El speaks, "Mike?" she whispers, and he moves to look down at his adorable girlfriend.

"Yes El?"

"Thank you for what you said before it makes me feel...good, happy, it's hard to place" she says.

Mike's heart fills with giddiness as he smiles down at his girlfriend, bending down to give her another quick kiss, pulling away only slightly before whispering, "I meant every word El, I always will".

And with one last smile to one another, Mike turns back to the comic and begins to read again.

She's enjoying every moment that Mike reads to her as she immerses herself within the story.

"Bam, pow!" Mike exaggerates the words, throwing his hand out to mimic the words. "Cyclops, turns to look at-" Mike tries to continue with the comic, but Hopper's voice rings out from the kitchen, "Hey, kids come on out, dinners ready!"

Mike sighs beside her, "Aw man, we were just getting to the good part too" he whines, which makes El laugh, as she shuffles her way off the bed, holding out a hand to Mike, "We can read it after dinner, I'm starving" she states, giving the boy a look.

She watches as Mike smiles broadly as he scoots his way off the bed as well, grabbing onto El's hand, as they move out towards the kitchen.

El can see that Hopper has set their small table, and the chicken that sits in the middle makes her mouth water. For, it's a rare occasion for Hopper to actually take time and *make* a meal, versus just nuking a plastic meal in the microwave.

She eagerly pulls Mike towards the table, and before she can even reach for her chair, Mike is there pulling it out for her and gesturing for her to sit. This surprises her, for she had seen guys on the soap operas she watches do this at restaurants. She was always amazed by how honored the woman looked when they took their seats.

And, for El, she could feel it too, but Mike seemed to have caught her hesitation, so he babbles on for a second about how it was a 'gentleman thing to do', so, she gives him a warm smile and sits down in her seat, as Mike sits to her left in the middle of the table.

Their plates are already set with portions of their meal, as Hopper moves to take his seat.

El picks up her fork to dig in, but Mike's voice stops her, "This looks great, thanks Hop", the boy says earnestly, and Hopper gives a small grunt in return. She can't help but allow a small, secret smile to pull onto her face, because even with that one small interaction, she silently hoped that it would be a bridge to a decent relationship between the two guys in her life that meant everything to her.

Conversation is small at the table, and El finds it weird. So, to break the silence she turns to Mike and begins to ask him about school. She's more than happy when Mike lights up, turning to her and giving her a low down on his day. She never turns away from the conversation as she picks at her meal when he takes a second to take a breath and do the same thing. El feels as if she could listen to him forever.

Just as they wind down from the meal, Hopper pats his face and nods towards the kids. "Alright, you know I brought Mike here for a reason, so...we've got to talk about it" Hopper begins to explain as, El feels her heart drop slightly, unsure as to where this conversation will go.

El watches as Hopper rolls his eyes, "Geez, don't look at me like it's the end of the world, or something" he jokes.

Mike speaks up just then, "So, what's it about then?"

Hopper clears his throat, "Well, El's told me that your mom is looking to have dinner with us?"

Mike nods slowly, "Yeah, she's been hinting at it pretty hard, she keeps asking why El doesn't come over and stuff".

"So, what have you been telling her?" Hopper asks.

El shifts uneasily in her seat.

Mike shrugs, "I just told her that El's new to town and has been adjusting".

Hopper huffs, " , I think we're going to have to tell your mother and father the truth" he comes out with the words with a wave of his hand, and both Mike and El's eyes widen.

"The truth?" Mike squeaks, shaking his head, "That's crazy!"

El sits silently, listening to the conversation between the other two people in the room. She's not exactly sure where it is going.

Hopper scratches at his beard, "Look, if El starts coming over to your house or she's out in town or something, your mom and dad are going to realize who El is. They saw a picture of her last year, I'm sure they'll recognize her".

El watches as Mike falls back in his seat at Hopper's words, and she can see the uncertainty written across his freckled face. So, she reaches out a reassuring hand and places it atop of her boyfriends, her eyes turn to Hopper, "Do we have to?" she asks gently.

She watches Hopper in anticipation as Mike squeezes her hand in his, as he ponders over her question.

Eventually, he lets out a long breath before answering, "Yes, I think it's the right thing to do", El turns to look at her lap, "Look, you kids want El to be out in public, and..." he pauses slightly, causing both El and Mike to look back at her adoptive father.

"And...I know you want to have a relationship" he states plainly, El feels the blush that spreads across her face, and out of the corner of her eye she can see that Mike's face is tinting red as well.

Hopper continues, "And if that's something you want, then I think having Mike's parents understand El and her background will make things easier for the both of you" he finishes as he looks between them both.

El turns towards Mike, who is turning to look at her as well. She can feel the intensity behind his gaze, without speaking, it seems as if they can have an entire conversation. He lifts an eyebrow up in question, *'it's your choice'* she feels him saying. And, she knows it is. Her heart races slightly in her chest because she knows there's a lot of

risk in anything they choose to do. But, being able to hang out with Mike in town and at his house sounded too good to pass up.

With a small pull at the corner of her mouth, Mike reads her small expression easily.

Mike turns towards Hopper, "Okay, but...I think we'll need a game plan" Mike states, and Hopper rolls his eyes once again, "Obviously, that's why I needed you here".

Mike frowns at him, but Hopper doesn't care as he stands from his seat and moves towards his room. El feels Mike's eyes on her as they stare at each other with wide eyes. That is until Hopper returns to the kitchen, placing a box on the table.

El takes a moment to read the box, and her eyes go wide when she realizes that the black words read: Hawkins Lab, she tenses in her seat as Hopper removes the lid. Mike stands and peers inside the box, "What's this?" the boy asks giving Hopper a look.

Hopper smirks at him, "This-" he starts as he begins grabbing files from the box, "Is how your parents will understand everything they need to know about El".

Three exhausting hours later, as the sun had set in the distance many hours before, the dark settles across the cabin.

Mike's pretty sure he has never studied something more diligently than the story he was currently relaying to Hopper, who, was rubbing at his tired eyes as he finishes listening to Mike's part of his story that he is to share with his parents.

He finishes his last part, slowly leaning back into his chair as he lets out a long yawn. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees El do the same, he smirks, relaying to himself as to how adorable she is.

"Alright" Hopper mumbles through tired breath, "Guess that's as good as it's going to get, besides it's...ten o'clock!" he roars, and at his exclamation, Mike is currently wide awake as he jumps to his feet, panic rising within him.

"Shit! My mom's going to kill me, I've got to call her!" he rushes over to the phone to start dialing his phone number, but freezes, he's been at the cabin since after school, and his mom had no idea where it was located. He was pretty sure he would be grounded for eternity. He turns to Hopper, "What am I supposed to tell her, especially when I arrive home in your cruiser!" he stresses.

He watches as Hopper shakes his head, "She knows I've adopted El" he shrugs, but Mike sighs, the older man not understanding the direness of the situation, "Doesn't matter, she'll think I did something wrong, and that's why I didn't call her, dammit!" he shouts in anger, he throws his hands down in defeat.

Mike is truly at a loss for what to do, so, he decides to stand there with the receiver in his hand, the dial tone droaning on, waiting to be dialed. At this Hopper stands and moves towards him taking the receiver from the shaking teen, "What's your number, I'll give her a call" he asks calmly.

Mike scrunches his face towards the man, he's not sure if he should or not, but with another look from the chief, Mike rattles off his number, in which Hopper dials into the phone.

Mike stands off to the side, awaiting for the other end of the line to be picked up.

He watches as Hopper coughs slightly, "Uh, yes, hi Karen, this is Chief Hopper calling".

Mike can only wonder what his mother is saying on the other end of the line. He quickly turns his head towards El, whose eyes are wide.

He can only hear the chiefs side of the conversation.

"I'm just calling to let you know Mike is still at our house" he explains into the phone. All while nodding silently as it seems his mother replies.

A pause and then a sheepish expression draws across Hopper's face, "Heh, well I'm sorry about that Karen, you see uh-" Hopper stops, staring at both he and El. Mike shrugs his shoulders before Hopper

continues.

"Uh, Mike caught me at the station and asked if he could see El, uhm, we live a ways out of town and it's not easy to get here on bike, especially with all the snow, they...they haven't seen each other for awhile and I figured it would be okay", he lies smoothly.

Mike's almost impressed by how easy it is for the older man to lie, however, he puts this information into the back of his head.

He's not sure what his mom says on the other end, but Mike watches as Hopper face pulls into a scowl before his next words, "Oh, haha, yes, of course, you know teens" Hopper rolls his eyes.

Another pause before Hopper nods his head again, "Yes, she's been adjusting, a lot of new changes". Mike guesses his mom has begun to talk about El, he can feel his chest tightening slightly.

He listens as Hopper lets out a long sigh before talking back into the receiver, "Yeah, yeah, El's talked a bit about it, we've...just been settling in, but, next week should work".

It surprises Mike when Hopper suddenly turns to look at himself and El, and he can tell the older man is thinking a thought through his head. So, with his lips tightened he speaks again, "You know, I lost track of time, the kids are tired, and I had a long day too, how about Mike crashes on the couch, tomorrow's Saturday anyways, I'm sure they'll enjoy spending the day together".

Mike's not sure if he heard the older man correctly, and his heart leaps within his chest. He feels El straighten beside him. He flicks his head down to the girl, who is already beaming up at him.

"Don't worry Karen, I'll be here the whole time, and I'll have a little talk with both of them. I don't think your son wants any trouble with the chief of police" Mike hears Hopper joke, and turns back towards the older man who is now fixing him with a tight stare, and he feels his inside squirm slightly.

He watches as Hopper nods slowly, "Yep, same here too" he agrees to his mom on the other end of the phone.

"No worries Karen, see you tomorrow, bye" he quips, moving to hang up the phone and turning back towards Mike and El.

Mike's pretty sure both he and El are failing miserably at trying to contain their excitement, because since it's a Friday night, that means he'll get to spend all day tomorrow with El, just him, with none of the other party members.

For, as much as he loves their group together, any moment alone with just El is extra special to him.

His excitement dies a little when Hopper begins to approach he and El, he points a finger directly at him, "Yes, it's okay for you to stay here Mike, but don't think it's going to be something regular" he gives him a look and he nods quickly.

"Okay then, why don't you kids get ready for bed, El, you take the bathroom first" Hopper nods to the bathroom.

El pops up from her seat, "Ok" she turns to Mike with a shy smile, in which he returns, his heart beat picking up once again. He's pretty sure he melts each time she gives him this look. So, he can't help but follow her figure as she disappears behind the bathroom door.

However, once the door is closed, it dawns on Mike: he's in the living room, alone, with El's dad.

He turns ever so slowly back to the man who hasn't moved from his spot, he tries to avoid his gaze, but the man approaches him slowly, causing Mike to look up slowly.

So, with a deep breath Mike speaks, "Chief" in a cautious voice, while the man throws back, "Kid" to him, getting even closer, and Mike's beginning to feel very uncomfortable.

"Look kid, I really hope I can trust you" his voice is low and firm.

Mike lets out an exasperated sigh, "Hop, we've been through this before, I won't do anything to hurt El, you know that" he raises his hands and drops them firmly, he honestly can't believe they're having this conversation *again*.

"I know, but...I don't know if El knows anything about...ya know" he shrugs his shoulders in defeat, Mike scoffs at him, rolling his eyes.

Mike's surprised by Hopper's words, for, doesn't the older man know that she watches soap operas all day, they cover *that* subject pretty well.

"I'm sure she knows *something* about, 'it'" Mike bites back but cringes slightly at his choice of words, not meaning for them to come out so harsh.

"Kid, I honestly don't know if she knows about the 'birds and the bees', which, I'm sure you have *some* knowledge in", he gives Mike a look.

Mike rolls his eyes as he stuffs his hands into his pockets, fighting the awkwardness that hangs between them "Obviously, I've had health class, and an older sister". Mike really wishes he wasn't having this conversation with his girlfriends father, because, no *duh*, he know a good deal about that stuff. But, that doesn't mean he would be pressuring El into any of it. Not that he was anywhere ready for that step himself.

Hopper snorts, "Just...I know she probably understands *some* things, but...I just don't want her to think..." he stops short, and as he stops, Mike looks up at him, their eyes meet, and Hopper drops his shoulders.

Mike sighs, he knows what Hopper is getting at. He doesn't want El initiating anything just because it's something she might have seen on t.v and not actually understanding what it means.

"I get it Hop, don't worry, I promise nothing will happen...now" he throws the 'now' onto the end, and he surprises himself, and he winces, wishing he didn't say it. But, in all honesty, for Mike, there was no one else he wanted to be with. And, he hoped with time, and growing together, that all of those intimate things that came with a budding relationship, would happen with El, but just not now.

A silence hangs between the two men. And Mike quips an eyebrow at Hopper's silence, and the chief finally shakes his head, "Just...just let

me get *the talk* in at least before anything happens" he jokes.

Mike's mouth drops open, he can't believe he had just said that to him, he holds up his hands, "Trust me, nothing will happen, not for quite awhile, we're too young" he stresses, and he watches as Hopper's shoulders relax as he laughs lightly.

"I'm just teasing, but I guess that talk does need to come sooner rather than later" Hopper huffs crossing his arms over his chest.

Mike laughs, "Yeah, I think it definitely does" and both males give each other small smiles, until a small voice breaks through, "Hey Mike, you can use the bathroom" El's hair is semi-wet from her shower she must have taken.

Mike can feel his face flushing furiously, because of course seeing her with wet hair is something new, and it means she's just taken a shower, his stupid teenage mind begins to wander, but he squashes it quickly before he breathes a "Thanks El" as he says quickly makes his way to the bathroom, the door shutting again behind him. He lets out a long breath as he leans against the wooden door. He's pretty sure he's going to die of embarrassment at some point in his life.

So, he turns towards the sink, where he sees El has laid out a new toothbrush and washcloth for him to use. A small smile pulls at his face as he moves to get ready for bed.

Just as Mike disappears behind the bathroom door, El gives Hopper a look, and he merely rolls his eyes, "Don't scare him" she says plainly, he scoffs in return, as he moves towards his bedroom, only to return a moment later holding an old pair of sweatpants.

He holds them out to her, "Hand these to him, he'll need something to sleep in" he instructs. El realizes then that Mike also doesn't have a shirt to sleep in, so she moves into her bedroom, she can feel Hopper's eyes on her as she does so.

She moves to her dresser and digs through her drawers, when, she stumbles upon a Star Wars t-shirt Dustin had gifted to her. She smiles, pulling it from its resting place as she moves back towards the

living room, beelining towards the bathroom.

Lifting her hand slowly, she knocks, it takes a second for some movement to be heard, but the door cracks open and she meets her boyfriends dark eyes. He lightens up when he sees her.

"Hey", he says softly. "Hi" she says back and they stand in silence for a moment, before El remembers why she came over, she holds the clothes up to Mike, who looks at the clothes and smiles.

"For you to sleep in" she explains as Mike reaches through the door taking the clothes from her.

"They're clean" she throws in too, and at this Mike laughs. El furrows her brows in confusion, and Mike takes notice, shaking his head.

"Sorry, it's just funny, remember the night we found you? I...kind of said the same thing" he shrugs his shoulders sheepishly.

El then returns the smile, shaking her head at the memory, "Yes" she says softly, ducking her head away from him. Mike gives her one last smirk, gently taking the clothes from her, and then moves back into the bathroom.

She turns around slowly, her heart pittering within her chest as she moves away from the bathroom door.

El moves back to the living room where Hopper has pulled out an old sheet and fluffs it out over the couch.

She watches from the side as Hopper tucks the old flat sheet blanket into the worn couch cushions. She notes that he stuffs the blanket a bit forcibly then she's seen him do before, but she pushes that from her mind.

Her eyes follow the man as he moves to his bedroom, disappearing for only a moment, and then returning with a drab old pillow and tosses it, along with another blanket onto the couch. A small smile pulls at the corner of her mouth, because she can see, plain as day that her new dad might be regretting his decision to let Mike stay over.

But, he continues to pack the old blanket into the couch and snags an old pillow from his closet and tosses that, along with another blanket for Mike to use for warmth.

Hopper catches El's eyes, giving her a pointed stare. She merely rolls her eyes at she makes her way towards her room, lightly shutting the door behind her, leaving just a crack to look out.

She watches Hopper toss the pillow onto the couch, just as the bathroom door creaks open, and Hopper raises his head, El's eyes follow, and she just barely catches Mike's hesitant look as he makes his way into the living room.

She can't help but giggle to herself as she sees him in Hopper's old sweatpants, which are much too big for him. But, the shirt she offered up, in which she usually is swimming in, almost fits him perfectly.

"Okay kid, it's all yours" El watches as Hopper nods to the couch, in which Mike returns his own nod, "Thanks" he says quietly as he moves towards the couch

Hopper raises an eyebrow to the girl, "Yes?" he asks her. El gives a small shrug, "Can I say goodnight?" her voice is low and sweet.

She watches as Hopper huffs, looking between herself and Mike, shaking his head, "Fine, but make it quick, and you *both* know the rules, Mike stays on the couch, El, you stay in your bedroom, alright?" he gives each of them a look.

El and Mike both nod aimlessly at his words. She moves closer to Mike, as Hopper makes his way into the kitchen.

Mike reaches for her hands, in which El allows him to take, he looks down at her, "Goodnight El, I look forward to spending the day with you tomorrow" Mike's voice is low. El giggles at him, "I know, I can't wait!" she says brightly, because it's been too long that they have had a day just together.

She knows Hopper is nearby and watching, but she *really* wants to give Mike a goodnight kiss, and he's giving her a particular look that

is telling her, he wants to do the same. So, not truly caring that Hopper is right behind them, El moves into Mike's arms, and without hesitation, he wraps his arms around her.

It's not typical for her to initiate a kiss, but a new boldness within her, has her moving her head, and Mike follows suit. She pushes herself upwards towards the boy and gives him a quick, gentle kiss. She swoons slightly as she pulls away, giving the boy a tender look, in which he returns. Although it is a short peck, each time they kiss is special for her.

They're brought out of their moment by a gruff voice, "Okay kids, time to turn in" Hopper nods them, so, even though she is disappointed to have to say goodnight to Mike, El pulls away from him and slowly makes her way to her room, as Mike moves to the couch, getting himself comfortable.

She shuts her bedroom door behind her gently, as she rests her back against the door, looking up towards the wooden ceiling of the cabin, a brilliant smile etched across her face. A sigh escapes her.

After a couple more seconds she moves away towards her door, and makes her way towards her bed, plopping down on her comforter and making herself comfortable. She wishes she could be out in the living room with Mike, but she's almost positive Hopper will be keeping a close eye on them.

But, she knows tomorrow will be a just as wonderful day knowing that she gets to spend the entire day with Mike. So, with excited thoughts for the next day, El falls asleep, her dreams filled with a certain boy.

He tosses and turns for most of the night, mostly because the couch he spent the night on was *not* comfortable, whatsoever. Not just that, but he honestly struggled to sleep thanks to the knowing thought that his girlfriend was just a couple steps away.

Even with a million thoughts streaming through his mind, he did manage to get a couple hours of sleep. Which seemed to have been cut short thanks to the blinding sun that cascaded through the cabin

windows.

Mike blinked blearily as the sun struck his dark eyes, he grunted in annoyance as he tried to cover his head with his blanket, but the blanket wasn't nearly thick enough to block out the rays.

So, with a disgruntled noise, Mike threw back his blanket and moved his hands to rub the sleep from his eyes. He sat up with one arm and stared at El's door. He didn't know if she was awake or not, or if Hopper would beat her to waking up.

He decided to lay back on the couch, and stare up at the ceiling, crossing his arms over his chest, as he decides to doze lightly.

A couple of minutes later he can feel himself start to drift, but a slight creek pulls him fast from his resting mind. He quickly flicks his head over towards the noise, and his eyes are met with a warm pair of brown eyes staring back at him.

A smile pulls at his face as he sits up even more. El raises an eyebrow at him, as she gingerly pulls her door open, the hinges creaking in return. And he can't help but chuckle to himself as El winces at the noise, as she makes it through her door.

She shuffles over to him quietly, as Mike sits up on the couch, El moving to sit beside him. "Good morning" she whispers close to him. "Hey, good morning" he returns, a loud yawn following.

"Sorry" he winces at her, but she only shakes her head, "Did you sleep okay?" she asks him. She's giving him an intent look, and so he decides to stretch the truth a bit. He nods, "Oh...oh yeah, really good" he tries. But, El gives him a knowing look and a small smile. "You don't have to lie Mike, it's not a very comfortable couch" she tells him.

Mike softens, giving her a sheepish look, "Yeah, sorry, it's not" and El giggles, "Only Hopper when he's dead tired falls asleep on that couch" she jokes and Mike laughs.

El settles back onto the couch and shivers slightly, "Also, sorry it's cold, this cabin doesn't stay warm" she says sadly.

Mike shakes his head, "No, I was actually fine, don't worry El!" he turns towards the girl, slightly worried. El tilts her head, "You weren't cold?" and Mike shakes his head, "No, I'm pretty warm blooded he shrugs.

And it surprises him next when the girl beside him decides to reach out and place her hand delicately on his face. He's pretty sure that he warms another ten degrees just with her touch. He watches intently as her eyes brighten, "Yes, you are *very* warm".

Mike smiles, "I make a good furnace" he tries to joke, but El shivers once again. He shifts slightly wondering if he should voice his next thought. "Uhm..." he starts, his voice failing him when the pretty girl beside him gives him a tender look.

Eventually with a quick swallow he finds his voice, "If you want, we can share my blanket, and I can share my warmth with you", he tries not to wince at the patheticness of his voice or blatant intentions behind his words.

But, of course the girl beside him smiles even brighter, "Yes, that would be nice" she nods to him. His eyes widen slightly, nodding himself, feeling his mouth go dry. "Okay" he whispers as he shifts to move the blanket behind himself and El.

The girl takes the blanket as she pulls it around herself, their shoulders shifting next to each other, and once again he feels himself warm even more. El shifts so that she pulls her legs to tuck up underneath herself as she lays her head gently on his shoulder.

He's pretty sure he stops breathing. "Hmmm, you *are* really warm" El coos as she snuggles closer to him. Mike then tentatively and carefully moves his left arm to wrap around El.

At his movement El looks up at him. Mike opens his mouth, "Oh, uhm, is this okay?"

The girl in turn brightens up at him, "Of course" she says. And Mike can't take the adorableness she is emanating, so with a bold move he moves his head down and captures her lips in his. He feels her startle slightly, but then pushes back against him. He shifts his head slightly,

in which she does the same.

It's an electrifying feeling that courses through them, each time they move, testing new things, when El pulls away slightly, a bashful look on her face. "Sorry, haven't brushed my teeth yet" she giggles. Mike touches his forehead with hers, chuckling with her, "Me either" he jokes as El rubs her nose affectionately against his.

She pulls away slightly and then turns to the t.v and then back to him, "Saturday morning cartoons?" she gives him a playful look. Mike nods enthusiastically, "Definitely". So, with a flick of his girlfriend's head, the t.v springs to life, as El settles against him with a sigh. And he settles his head onto hers. They entwine their free hands together and settle into the warm, comfortableness that is entirely theirs.

She secretly revels in the silence that sits between them as the minutes tick by as they watch another episode of *He Man*. It's something she finds so pure because of how much has happened and changed in her life.

El squeezes Mike's hand within hers, in which he quietly returns, their gazes still fixed upon the television set.

She's basking in all that it's worth, however, a knowing percolating sound begins to echo across the cabin. El immediately knows what the sound is, as she and Mike turn quickly, breaking apart, their eyes falling onto Hopper.

"Morning!" he gives them a bright, knowing smile, as El rolls her eyes at him, huffing, she turns back towards the television. She can hear her dad laughing behind her, but she tries to ignore it, entwining hers and Mike's hands once again. She can feel her boyfriends stiffness beside her.

"Sleep good?" he questions Mike who turns back to him. El flicks her eyes in his direction, watching him nod, his messy hair moving in all directions, "Yes, couch was okay, the fire was definitely nice though" he gestures to the dying fire.

"That's good, it does get pretty cold in here at night sometimes"

Hopper then moves towards the fireplace to put some more logs in to get it roaring once again.

After he's finished he moves back to the kitchen, El hopes he just leaves them alone, but another question comes from over their shoulders, "What'll it be for breakfast?" he asks the two. El feels her stomach rumble, and it's the only thing that pulls her attention away from Mike, she turns excitedly towards him, "Eggo-extravaganza!?" she asks enthusiastically. She knows Mike has had eggos before, but the way Hopper made the sweet treat, she wanted to make sure Mike experienced it as well.

She watches as Hopper sags slightly, "Really, you're going to show your boyfriend how bad you eat?" he teases. El can feel her face warm at his words, "Daaad!" she groans at him, as Mike laughs beside her.

She turns towards him with a glare as he shrugs his shoulders, "Well, I guess it's my fault you like them so much anyways" he jokes, and she gives him a slight shove, "Yes, it is your fault" she agrees with a brimming smile.

"I remember when I first gave you one, you didn't seem so sure about them" Mike reminisces while Hopper moves around noisily around the kitchen.

El shakes her head, "I'd never seen one before, it was so weird" she admits, as she begins to think back to that first morning in Mike's home. She had been so scared throughout the night, even more so with the thunderstorm that had thrashed about all night.

However, she remembers the kindness that enveloped Mike in every way, and she knew she could trust him. So, when he had brought down that first eggo, she honestly didn't know what to think. But, her stomach had roared to try it anyways, and after the first bite, she was hooked, and she knows it wasn't just the eggo, but the boy who had introduced her to it as well.

She looks up at her boyfriend with a soft look and he tilts his head in questioning. And without words she just shakes her head, smiling, and that's all Mike needs to understand, returning her smile, as they

sit back and look back to the t.v.

Only a couple minutes pass before Hopper calls them into the kitchen, both teens stand, hand in hand as they approach the table. El's eyes widen as her gaze falls upon the amazingness of the eggo-extravaganza.

"Wow, that is impressive" Mike nods to the masterpiece. "Yep, my own invention" Hopper states proudly.

El's stomach rumbles as her eyes trail the deliciousness before her, so, she sits down with wide eyes as she grabs at one of the eggos, pieces of candy fall away. She places it on her plate and reaches for the bottles of chocolate and maple syrup, slathering her piece greedily.

Once she's satisfied, she brings her head down and takes a bite of her eggo and hums at the goodness. She turns to her boyfriend, "Try it Mike, it's so good!"

"Chew with your mouth closed" Hopper nods to the girl, who only rolls her eyes as she continues to munch on her eggo.

She happily munches on her own eggo, waiting for Mike to grab his own, he eventually moves his arm out to take his own eggo and slowly bending down as he bites into it, he nods in delight, "Yeah, that's pretty good, definitely cavity inducing" he jokes.

This stops El, "What's, cavity?" she mimics back to Mike, who chews and swallows his food before answering her question. "Oh, it's when you get like this hole in your tooth from eating too much sugar, it kind of rots away at your teeth".

El's eyes widen as she places her eggo back down at her plate, she doesn't like the sound of that, "I don't want my teeth to rot" she says worriedly. But, Mike always quick to reassure her, reaches out and squeezes her hand, their eyes meet, "Don't worry El, it only happens if you don't brush your teeth or eat way too much sugar, I saw you have a tooth brush in the bathroom".

El nods at this, "Yes, Hopper makes me brush twice a day". Mike smiles at this, "Then you should be good, and it's not like you have

this everyday" he gestures to the eggo mountain.

'*This is true*' crosses through her mind, as Hopper will only make the special treat on rare occasions. She wishes she could have it everyday, but she knows it's not 'healthy' as Hopper had explained to her. So, with a satisfied smirk, she turns back to her breakfast, finishing it quickly.

It doesn't take long for her and Mike to finish up their breakfast, and the second Mike finishes his plate, El grabs onto his hand, both sticky from the syrup and drags him off, "Come on Mike, let's go play some games!" she says excitedly.

Mike beams at her, following her along to her bedroom.

He finds that the more time he spends with El, the more he comes to realize how alike they are. She had pulled out numerous card and board games, eager to learn about each one. He enjoyed this about her because he was always fascinated by new things as well. Of course, most everything in the world was new for El to learn, but being able to teach her and watch her learn quickly was something that made his chest swell.

After El had managed to beat him numerous times at war and even chutes and ladders, they eventually decided to get dressed for the day.

Mike moved to the bathroom where he donned his clothes from yesterday, which he was thankful didn't smell like most of his clothes usually did after one wear. It was one thing he despised about becoming a teenager, it didn't seem to matter how much deodorant or cologne he splashed on, his teenage stink tended to waft through.

He looked at the mirror and decided to fix his wild hair the best he could, using some water to tame down the curls. He then quickly brushed his teeth and exited the bathroom, and made his way back towards El room.

Her door was half way open, but he still knocked gingerly before entering, not wanting to startle her. At his knock, El moved the door

all the way open, smiling, gesturing for him to come in.

He couldn't help but take in her appearance, she had changed into a simple pair of jeans, and a bright purple shirt, with a dark flannel covering her shoulders. He couldn't help but admire her. She caught his look and she raised an amused eyebrow up at him.

"Pretty" is all he says, and his statement causes the girl to flush madly, ducking her head. "Thank you" she whispers, and they move back to her bed, where with shy glances they return to their game.

Noon eventually rolls around, and El announces that she is hungry, so, she pulls Mike into the kitchen, practically demanding that Hopper feeds them.

With a grunt, he fixes them each a sandwich, when El's eyes turn out towards the window and then back to Hopper. "Can we play outside?" she asks innocently.

Mike's chewing slows as he looks at the older man hesitantly. He honestly hadn't expected El to ask to go outside the cabin, but he also wasn't arguing, for he enjoyed playing in the snow.

Hopper lets out a long breath, but nods his head, "Yes, but you stay right next to the cabin" he wags his large finger at the two of them.

El squeals delightedly, as they finish their sandwiches and move to bundle up to head outside.

The snow has finally stopped falling, and since it had warmed up slightly, the snow was sticky beneath their boots.

Mike gazes upon his girlfriend who is looking around excitedly at the new snow that had fallen, creating a picturesque landscape around them. He can't help but smile, she turns towards him, grinning.

"Watch this!" Mike says as he opens up his arms and falls back into the snow. He moves his arms and legs just so, and then stands gingerly to his feet, finding El beside him.

He points down to the ground, "See? That's a snow angel" he describes the shape to her. El's eyes widen in excitement, as she

moves to right of his own snow angel, plopping down into the snow and mimics Mike's movements. She holds up an hand, which he takes and pulls her up.

She can't contain her amusement, "Look, it's like their holding hands" she gushes moving to stand beside Mike, taking his own hand in hers. "Yeah, it does" he smiles down at their masterpieces.

He turns his head to look down at the girl beside him, and she casts a look up to him. He can't help but bend down and rub his nose with hers, which makes her giggle.

"Have you ever made a snowman?" Mike asks, and with a shake of her head, Mike eagerly begins to teach his girlfriend the art of making one.

However, half way through getting the middle done, as El worked on the snowman's head, a thought pops into his head. So, he stops his work and gathers a small amount of snow into his hand, he then lobbs the snowball at El, being careful to not hit her in the head.

With a 'poof' the snowball makes contact. El whips her head around to him, and he tries to feint innocence.

"Mike" El's voice echoes around them. He gives her a look, "Yes, El?" he says softly.

"Did...did you throw something at me?" she asks unsure.

A small teasing smile dances on his lips and El's mouth drops open, "Why would you throw something at me?" her voice is slightly filled with sadness, so Mike moves towards her, picking up a handful of snow on the way.

He gives her a soft look, "It's kind of like a game, you throw snowballs at each other, it's called a snowball fight" he explains.

El takes a step back, "I don't like fighting" she says with a frown, but Mike follows her shaking his head, "No, see, you grab sticky snow like this-" and he gestures to his mittened hand holding a pile of snow. "And then you pack it together-" he moves his second hand and begins to work the snow into a ball. "See, now you have a snowball,

and you can throw it" and lastly Mike throws the snowball into a nearby tree, where, it spatters into a million pieces, the tree bark now sporting a white spot.

He looks down at the girl whose eyes are wide, she looks back to him, "But, why throw it at each other?" she questions. Mike bends down, scooping up some more snow and working it into a ball, he hands it to the girl, and she gives it a peculiar look.

"It's just fun, you just don't aim for people's heads is all" he shrugs. El stares at him with narrowed eyes, so he steps forward and reaches down to take El's gloved hand in his, he gently places the snowball in her hand, and then takes about ten steps back, holding out his arms, "Alright, now throw it at me!" he yells excitedly.

El looks down at the snowball, and then back to Mike, "But...I don't want to hurt you!" she calls back. Mike laughs, his breath pillowing out into the cool air. "You won't, trust me!" he says.

And with one more sigh from the girl, she casts her arm back and then throws the snowball directly at him. For someone who's never thrown a ball of any sort, Mike's surprised with her accuracy as the ball spins towards him, and then gently knocks into his arm, dissipating at impact.

He laughs, which echoes across the trees, "See! I'm fine!" he calls out and El gives him a brilliant grin back. He bends down once again to make a snowball, and El watches him. "Okay, now just keep making them and we throw them at one another" he explains as he lobbs another snowball at El, which she dodges easily, bending down as she does so, grabbing another fistful of snow, and balling it up like Mike did.

She lets it go, and Mike dodges it, but to his surprise he feels something cold hit the back of his head.

"Hey!" he shouts teasingly towards the girl who is now whipping at her nose, who is now giving him a knowing look.

And that's how their small snowball fight starts. He and El move about the snow covered ground, tossing snowballs back and forth, El

hitting him more times than not, thanks to her power.

Each of them using trees to dodge the oncoming snowballs. Their laughter rings through the forest, and Mike can't remember a better time. He thoroughly enjoys watching El squeal in delight as they chase each other around, her face becoming redder from the cold and laughter.

His eyes follow her as she moves between trees, when he is finally able to hit the back of her coat, the snow bursting and going down her coat.

"Cold!" she yells as she tries to shake the snow out from her coat and off her bare skin. Mike can't help but double over in laughter watching her dance around. When he hears her stop, he opens his eyes to find a mischievous look crossing her face, she then takes aim and with all her might tosses the snowball at him, and it hits him square in the face, knocking him off balance as he falls to the snow beneath him.

"Ugh" he grunts as the cold seeps onto his bare face. He can hear his girlfriend laughing now. It didn't even hurt, but, he decides to lay there, motionless for a bit to see what the girl does.

It doesn't take long for him to hear her hurried steps towards him, "Mike!" she calls out frantically and skids to her knees beside him. He chooses to play possum as El wipes the snow from his face, which he is thankful for.

"Mike, I'm so sorry, you said not to aim for the face, and I didn't mean to hurt you and-ahhhh!" she cries as he moves his free hand beside him and flicks a handful of snow into her face. She sputters and then hits him lightly, "Mike, that's not funny it's cold!" she says as she wipes the snow from her face.

It's his turn to laugh again, as he sits up on his arms, as El flails. "Ah, you should have seen the look on your face" he teases. El gives him a glare, and moves quickly to push him back down into the cold snow, which goes down his back, as his girlfriend holds him there.

"Geez that's cold!" he grimaces and El giggles, and Mike can't help but

do so too. "Okay, okay, truths?" he looks up into the girls light eyes, as she stares down at him, nodding, "Truths" she whispers.

And then, they're in their own little world, their mouths still holding soft smiles, but each of them allow their eyes to flick between their lips and eyes. He's not sure who move firsts, but he knows they both have the same idea.

So, he brings his head up slightly, as El bends down, and their lips meet. He can feel the wetness of snow against her cheek, and the coldness of her lips from the air around them.

He moves his hand to cup her delicate cheek as she moves pressing even more firmly against his lips, which pull into a smile. They then break apart, with sheepish expressions. Mike sighs, "If that's what a snowball fight with you always ends with, then I'd like to have one with you everyday" he says cheesily, making the girl laugh.

"Me too" she agrees, and they just sit there for a bit, before a cold wind washes over them, causing both of them to shiver.

Mike moves so that he can stand, offering a hand to El, "Come on, let's get warmed up" he offers pulling the girl to her feet, as she moves to hold onto his arm. "Yes, hot chocolate" she hums and Mike silently agrees as they trudge through the snow and back to the cabin.

Once inside, they shed their outside clothing and hang it up to dry. She moves to the kitchen where she fishes for mugs and sets off to make her and Mike hot chocolate.

Mike gives her a questioning look, "Hopper taught me" she explains, in which he simply smiles and nods to.

After she has made them two cups of hot chocolate they retreat once again to her room, this time they spread themselves out on her rug, where Mike picks up where he left off with his comic. El snuggles up close to him as he reads.

Time seems to pass too quickly as El enjoys every moment that she

can with Mike. And it seems all too soon when Hopper enters her room

"Hate to cut the fun, but I've got to get Mike home, it's started snowing again" the chief of police gestures to El's window, where fat white flakes float down.

El and Mike both groan at his statement, as El moves to sit on her knees, "Can Mike stay again?" she widens her brown eyes, and gives Hopper a look that she knows can work wonders on the man.

But to her disappointment Hopper shakes his head, "Not tonight kid, I promised Karen I'd have Mike home tonight, besides I'm sure he's sick of being in the same clothes".

"But-" El starts to argue but Hopper holds up a hand to stop her, "El, last night was because it was too late to bring Mike home, he'll be able to come over another time, plus you'll see him next weekend", he tries to reason.

El's face falls even more, but Mike sits up to her level as he reaches out a hand to place on top of hers, "Don't worry El, if the snow is better maybe me and a few of the other party members will come and visit you, and Hopper's right, I'll see you next weekend too".

She smiles at his words, for he always knows what to say so she whispers a soft "Okay" as the two smile at one another.

"Alright, let's get going then before the snow gets any worse" Hopper states to the two teens, who slowly get to their feet and make their way towards the door.

A couple minutes later they're all riding together in the chilled cruiser, as they wait for the heat to kick in.

Mike and El chat quietly in the back seat as Hopper focuses on the road, which have become slick with the new snow. Eventually, they pull up to Mike's house.

Mike hops out first, El following. She shuts the door behind her, and moves so that she and Mike are out of his eyesight.

She can't help but pull Mike close to her, which seems to surprise him at first, but he quickly gives in as he wraps his arms around her waist, his chin resting firmly on her head, while she lays her cheek against his chest.

"It was great to see you, and even better we got time to spend alone together" Mike's words verberate through his chest. El nods against him, "Even better that you got to stay over too" she hums.

Mike pulls away so that they are eye to eye with one another. "I can't wait to get even more time with you El, we're going to have so much fun doing new things" he whispers.

El's heart swoons at his words. And instead of answering him, she pushes on her tiptoes and tilts her head so that her lips connect with his. She finds that each time either of them do this, it sends a thrill down her spine, and it's a sensation she absolutely loves and has become addicted to. This time she reaches up and places her hands on his cheeks and pulls him down even more so, causing a new noise to erupt from Mike's throat.

They pull away slowly, El tilting her head at him. Mike reddens, "Uh, sorry, it was just...nice, feeling you so close like that" he winces at his words and El giggles. "I like it to" she responds, which makes him smile.

Mike swoops in and gives her another quick peck, she barely registers it as he pulls away. She follows him hoping for more, but instead he pulls her into another hug. "I've got to go, but I'll see you next weekend, okay?" he moves away slightly, and El nods frowning slightly, "Okay, goodnight Mike" she whispers moving to place a sweet kiss on his cheek. He hums, "Goodnight El" he returns and slowly pulls away from her.

She opens the passenger door and hops in, "Bye!" she yells from the vehicle and Mike turns and waves to her.

She watches as they pull out of Mike's driveway. Her heart and soul warm from their time together as she allows herself to settle into her seat, content with her life.

Ugh, I'm so so so sorry this took forever and a day! The Mileven chapters take me a million times longer! I hope you enjoyed this one I've been working on it for weeks to try to get it completed! But, I just graduated with my Master's and got hired at my internship as a full time employee so I'm SUPER busy!

So, with that I've been thinking and wanted readers input on this idea. I'm thinking of combining the chapters so that I'm not having to combine the first one so much and instead flipping between viewpoints.

I might do the next chapter as a test and see what you guys think, does that sound good? I just think I'll be able to get more out if I can save some time, so PLEASE REVIEW and let me know how you liked this chapter and what you think about this idea.

You are all awesome!

11. Dinner At The Wheelers

Thank you all so much for the fantastic reviews, they were so sweet and heartfelt, I can't express how much I appreciate and love reading every single one of them! Also, thank you on the input on combining chapters together, and honestly as some of you expressed, I too believe that it will make the story less repetitive.

This chapter will be a combination of Hopper and Mileven's viewpoint. I will let you know when the viewpoints switch.

So, let's see how this goes!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Chapter 6 (Combined Viewpoints)

Hopper's POV

He believed that this week was probably one of the longest he had experienced in his life. At some points throughout the week, his mind would be settled and at ease for most of the day, not a care in the world.

But, as the week crept on, he noticed an increase in his irrational thoughts as Saturday loomed even closer.

Today, Wednesday, was one of those days. He had arrived to work just fine, El was still snuggled up in her bed when he left, and he had a cup of coffee in one hand, and a plain donut in the other, usually a happy morning for him.

However, as the day drifted by his mind continuously wandered to thinking about the upcoming dinner.

'*Was she ready?*', swam in and out of his mind like a taunt, the words ready to drive him insane.

Hopper currently found himself still sitting at his desk, his trusty hat set off to the side, but both of his large hands were curled into his

thinning hair.

He sighed heavily as he moved his hands back and forth, wishing for the ruminating thoughts to leave his mind. He had never experienced this much anxiety in his life before, and over a silly little dinner, it was something he wasn't used to.

'But it's not just a silly little dinner' his thoughts echoed, *'It could mean either a relief for letting Mike's parents know about El, or an absolute disaster!'*, his words pounded against his head, causing his headache to deepen.

"Ugh", he groaned as he held his head tighter in his grasps. A couple moments later he pushed himself from his desk, exhaling a deep breath as his lounge chair groaned at the new weight.

"No...Mike's parents will understand, the kids will be fine" he growled to himself, trying desperately to convince his traitorous thoughts, that, this Saturday *will* be okay.

But honestly, he didn't know.

Mike had stopped by Monday after school and had sheepishly reminded Hopper that he was pretty sure his mom would be more accepting, it was his dad he was more concerned about.

And this is what was driving Hopper insane. He had almost called the dinner off right then and there. For, the last thing he wanted was Ted Wheeler to be calling up the government to come and hunt down El, and that was his biggest concern.

He found himself reaching for the telephone more times than he could count from the last three days. Armed to call the kid himself and tell him that they needed more time.

However, when Mike had come in that day to check and see if he and the others could go see El at the cabin, he had expressed, with a bright red face, how eager his mom was to finally meet his girlfriend. And even though Hopper could see the nervousness in Mike's face, he could also see the excitement. Because, if this evening went well, it meant El would be allowed more freedom, she would be able to go to

Mike's house more often.

Even though *that* thought alone worried Hopper, he knew the young girl he had taken in and adopted wouldn't be *little* very much longer. Not that she was actually that little anyways, the girl had defeated and killed more monsters and people than himself, who was a big town cop years ago.

He knew she deserved this night, even if it meant it was a huge gamble. But, if for some awful reason the night did go sour, he knew he'd be able to take care of it...somehow.

With one last exhale, he finally stood to his feet and paced around his small office, hoping the movement would eventually settle his mind.

When he arrived home, El sat curled up on the couch watching another soap opera re-run. She turned her head towards him as he walked in the door, she gave him a quick smile, "Hi", she says before turning her attention back to the television.

Hopper moved slowly, hanging his hat and jacket up and then moving towards the kitchen to grab a beer, "Hey kid" he said as he passed her. Moving towards the fridge and receiving his wanted prize.

As he pried open the cap from his bottle, a fizzing noise following, he approached the couch as he took a swig of his drink.

To his surprise when he rounded the couch, he found that El wasn't watching the television. Instead her head was bent down looking at her lap, where, an open document laid there.

It was the script that they had rehearsed over and over again. Hopper moved to sit on the sagging armrest of the couch as he nodded at the document El's eyes were scanning frantically.

"Whatcha' doing there kid" he asked lowly. El doesn't move her head, "Reading...memorizing" she says softly.

Hopper lets out a puff of air from his nose in amusement, "Is that all you've been doing all day?" he asks the girl, and this time she moves

her head upwards and meets his eyes, "Yes" her words are guarded, almost as if she is silently asking if he is going to tease her for over preparing herself.

He holds up his hands in defense, "Woah, easy with those eyes, kid. I was just asking" he chuckles as he moves to sit beside the girl.

She lets out a heavy sigh, "I'm scared" are her next words which startles him slightly.

Hopper turns his full attention to the girl now, "What are you scared of?" he questions.

El shrugs her shoulders heavily. "I'm scared that...they won't understand, that they won't like me", her face falls.

Hopper reaches around El's shoulder and pulls her close to him, trying to soothe the girl.

"Hey, don't you worry about Mike's parents. What really matters is that Mike cares about you" he attempts to decrease the girls worries.

El pulls back slightly, not looking up at him, "But...if they don't like me then...then how will Mike and I get to spend time together. They'll probably tell him we can't be together", her voice is full of sorrow.

He lets out another long breath, rubbing soothing circles into the girls back, "Kid, I promise, I won't let that happen, and I'm sure Mike won't allow it either" he chuckles lightly.

At this El finally turns her head up to him, he can see that she's fighting back tears, "Really?" her voice is low.

Hopper nods slowly, "Yes, I know Mike won't let anything happen to you. I won't let anything happen to you, okay?"

El nods lightly, shifting in her seat so that the notes he had given her sit open once again in her lap.

"It's good practice to read that, not only for memorization, but I can see your pronunciation and speaking is really improving" he tells her.

She moves her head quickly to look at him, her eyes now bright and a smile dances on her face, "I am?" she asks slightly unsure.

Hopper beams back at her, "Of course, you come a long way kid" he states. El smiles brightly again and then turns back to her papers, while he lays his back against the old couch, turning his own attention to the television.

He hopes that Saturday will go well, he's desperately trying to remain calm for her, but it's becoming more and more difficult as the days dragged by.

For now though, he takes another long pull of his drink, and allows his mind to become distracted by the flashing t.v.

Mileven POV

He doesn't think that he's *ever* been this nervous before in his life. Sure, there was the multiple science fairs where he and his friends have had to present in front of multiple peers and teachers, but he was never alone. There were also times where when he was alone with El he could feel his heart racing within his chest. But this was entirely different.

He was introducing his girlfriend to his parent's.

Not only that, but his girlfriend was special beyond belief. That was a fact that held fast and true to him in more ways than one. For, she was a telekinetic badass who had escaped a horrible childhood, she had defeated more than a dozen monsters, *and* she opened and closed a gate to another dimension.

These thoughts danced through his mind as he stood at his bedside, scratching at his head, as he looked at his numerous clothes that were strewn across his bed.

He never had to think this hard in his life. And it was all due to the fact that he wanted this dinner to be absolutely perfect, he wanted his parent's to know just how special El was to him.

Because he knew she was special, and that was even before he knew

she had powers. His mind always drifts back to that first night, and that week they had spent together. He'd be lying to himself if he said there wasn't something within him that found himself drawn to El.

For, to Mike, she wasn't *just* some girl he was bringing home to introduce to his parents, but she was someone who made him feel entirely different.

A smile began to tug at his face as he reminisced on all the things he found special about his girlfriend. The way she gazed upon the world with wonder, her kind and sweet spirit, and the way she smiled at him, it was something that made a shiver run up his spine, and his heart to leap out of his chest.

Knowing that this night meant a lot to her, and to him, he wanted everything to be perfect.

So, that's why he found himself staring at his clothes with disdain on Friday evening, trying to figure out what would be the best thing for him to wear.

He bends down picking up his navy and crimson striped sweater. He moves it around, examining every inch of it. But, a frown quickly pulls at his face as he tosses it down to the floor, as it haphazardly joins a pile of other dejected sweaters.

"Gah, why is *every* nice pair of clothing I own a *sweater!*" he yells at no one in particular as he throws his hands up into the air as he flops himself onto his bed, wrinkling the rest of the clothes that lay beneath him.

He lays there in frustration, glaring up at the ceiling, wishing he could have cooler clothes other than the lame sweaters he always wore.

Mike continues to rant and rave within his head, when a knock echoes from his door.

"Mike?" he can hear his sisters muffled voice through his door.

He rolls his eyes, "Go away!" he shouts, not being in the mood to have to deal with his sisters teasing.

He doesn't hear a reply, and he's genuinely surprised she actually listened. But, before he can silently rejoice, he hears his door creak open, he sits up as fast as lightning. His dark eyes meeting his matching sisters, he glares, "What the hell, you can't just barge in here!" he growls at her.

Nancy rolls her eyes at she steps into his room, her eyes widening as she gazes at all his clothes strewn about. "What are you doing in here?" she asks.

Mike stands and begins to pick up his clothes and throwing them onto a pile on his bed, "Nothing", he barks, "Can you just go!?" he gestures towards his door, but his attempt at intimidation falls short on the older girl, who only folds her arms over her chest, and gives him a look.

"No, it looks like a tornado went through here. Why do you have all your sweaters out?" she questions as she bends down and picks up his discarded green pillared sweater.

He approaches her and swipes the sweater from her grasp, "None of your business".

Nancy huffs out a laugh, "Right. Doesn't look like nothing to me" she singsongs as she bends down to grab another sweater with a knowing smirk, "In fact, it looks like you're trying to figure out what to wear for your little dinner tomorrow" she teases, and Mike freezes at her words, tossing another handful of sweaters onto his bed.

"No" he lies lamely, and Nancy laughs again. "You're awful at lying" she shook her head at him, as he sits down on his bed, placing his head in his hands, "Yeah, well you're awful at being supportive" he bites back.

Silence falls across his room as Mike rubs at his head, trying to soothe the headache that is beginning to form across his head.

He feels his bed sink as Nancy sits beside him and places a gentle hand on his shoulder, he turns to look at her. A guilty look falls across her face.

She sighs, "I'm sorry Mike. I was just teasing, I never seen you so distressed about something is all" she explains.

Mike huffs, "Yeah, well, it's not like there's ever been another time where I actually had a girlfriend".

Nancy nods, "No, and that's why this means so much to you. El's a special girl", her voice is soft.

Mike turns his eyes to meet his sisters, he can feel his face flushing at her words, "She is special" he agrees, and Nancy smiles brightly at him, as she moves to wrap him in a tight hug.

He stiffens at the contact, "Awe, my baby brother's in *love!*", she cooed as he tries to wrestle free.

"Shut up" he grumbles as his face turns redder at her words.

Nancy finally pulls away from him, grinning ear to ear as she finishes with a quick ruffle to his already messy hair. "I'm just teasing, it's what big sisters do".

Mike rolls his eyes at her, "Yeah, and you do that all the time". She shoves him, "Not like you didn't when I started seeing Steve" she reminds him, causing him to laugh, "But older sisters are supposed to look out for their younger brothers".

Nancy shakes her head, "And little brothers are supposed to keep their big sisters secrets" she raises an eyebrow at him, and then they lock in a short eye staring contest, before they both break out in laughter.

"Guess I *should* be a good older sister and help you find something" Nancy sighs while gesturing to the mess of his room.

Mike shakes his head, "I've got nothing, just stupid sweaters" he grumbles.

Nancy moves across his room and heads for his closet, where she digs a little, he watches her with little interest.

"Ah, ha!" she says as she steps out of his closet, as she pulls out a

plain, light grey flannel. She holds it up to him proudly.

"Remember, mom bought this for you to try to give you something different to try, but I'm pretty sure you stuffed it in the back of your closet because you are a little attached to your sweaters?" she gives him a look.

He stands, huffing as he takes the flannel from her, "Yeah, I'll look like a complete idiot in this".

Nancy takes it back from him, "No. You won't" she reassures him. "I know you have a nice white t-shirt around here somewhere".

Mike nods as he moves towards his dresser, opening the top drawer and fishes his hands around, pulling a plain white t-shirt.

"Okay, put that on" she demands, and he can't help but give her an incredulous look. "What?" he asks confused.

Nancy scoffs as she tosses the flannel at him, along with a pair of his nice black jeans that had been discarded on the floor.

"Put these on, I'll wait outside" is all she says before she disappears behind his door.

He slumps, stupefied by his sisters demands. But, he looks at the clothing in his hands, and sighs, folding to his sisters idea.

He shrugs the grey flannel on just as Nancy knocks on the door, "You done?" she asks and Mike turns to look at himself in his mirror.

"Yeah" he says as he looks himself over, just as Nancy walks in gasping slightly. "What?" he asks unsure, but his sister is beaming at him.

"You look so handsome Mike! Definitely an upgrade from the sweaters!" she miffs as she straightens his clothes out slightly before spinning him back around to look into the mirror once again.

This look is definitely not something he is used to, so it's weird to see himself in something other than a sweater.

"It's...different" he admits out loud. "A *good* different" Nancy encourages.

Mike lets out a long breath, "I'm not sure, I just...don't feel like myself" he shrugs his shoulders.

Nancy rolls her eyes yet again at him, "Mike, you're going to feel weird no matter what you wear. You're bringing a girl home to your parent's, and not only that, you're going to be telling them all about her past".

Mike stiffens at this, having forgotten about *that* part of the dinner. His face pales, "You okay Mike?" Nancy bends to look at him.

"Uhm..." he tries to speak, but his words fall flat. Now his stomach is turning and knotting. He places his hands on his dresser to steady himself.

He feels Nancy's reassuring grip on his shoulder. "Woah, Mike, I didn't mean to psych you out" she says.

And at this he takes a deep breath, attempting to restart his brain. He shakes his head, "No...I know, just got a wave of nerves".

Nancy giggles beside him, "Don't worry too much little brother. Tomorrow night will be fine, I'll be there too" she reminds him.

At this Mike lets out a long breath at this realization, "Right...right" he nods his head.

Nancy pats his back reassuringly, "I'll let you get changed so that you don't get these clothes dirty" she states as she begins to head towards his door.

However, she stops, halfway out the door, and turns towards him, "Hey, Mike?" she says softly, and he turns towards her, waiting for her to speak.

"It's good to see you happy again" she smiles brightly at him, in which he returns as she gives one last nod before moving out of his room and closes the door behind her.

Mike turns back to his mirror and gives himself another once over, tugging at his flannel. However, he stops as his sister's words sit at the forefront of his mind. He then turns to look at his face, and he can see the small smile dancing on his own lips.

He brightens within himself as he can actually see how happy he has become ever since El's return a couple months ago. He truly feels whole again.

She paces within her bedroom as she finishes pulling on her new dress that Hopper had brought home to her yesterday. It's a cotton, pastel purple dress, decorated with embroidered flowers at the bottom. She couldn't wait to put the dress on for the Saturday night dinner, but now she struggles to tie the long strings behind her because her hands are shaking nervously.

Her mind is reeling, a million thoughts and feelings streaming in and out. She finally huffs in frustration and yells out in frustration, as she places her hands on her hips.

"Woah, everything okay in there kid?" Hopper's voice startles her as it trails through her wooden door.

She looks at herself in the old standing mirror Hopper had gifted her. She glares at her reflection.

"El?" Hopper's voice comes through once again, this time a little more forcefully. She huffs and moves towards her door, throwing it open, a surprised Hopper meets her.

"I can't get it to tie!" she yells up to him. Hopper holds up his hands, "Okay...why didn't you ask me to do it for you?" he asks.

Logically, his question makes perfect sense, but El is too frustrated at herself to admit her wrong. So, instead she dramatically rolls her eyes and turns away from him, going back to her mirror and trying to tie the knot behind her once again.

She can feel her angry tears pricking at the corner of her eyes, and she tries to hold them in, not wanting to cry out in frustration.

She's so wrapped up in her thoughts she doesn't hear Hopper approach her from behind. "Kid, hey, come on, let me do it for you" he says gently.

Instead of responding, she flings her arms to her side and growls angrily. She hears Hopper chuckle as he kneels and pulls at the strings at her side as he begins to tie it into a bow behind her.

"You look really good" he tries to make small talk. She feels her anger dissipate slightly at his words, her arms fall to her side.

Hopper stands behind her, both of them looking at the mirror before them. Her eyes move and grace over him quickly. He's wearing a long sleeved, navy blue button up shirt and a pair of khaki pants. His hair is combed back as well. She smiles, happy that he dressed up for this occasion.

"You too" she says softly, causing him to chuckle lowly. He pats her shoulders, "Don't worry kid, you look great, and I know Mike is probably nervous too".

She lets out a long breath she didn't know she was holding. "I hope tonight goes well" her voice is soft.

"It will El, don't you worry," Hopper gives her shoulder one last squeeze before he moves towards her door.

El turns back to examine herself in the mirror. She turns this way and that. Making sure her dress is perfect.

She then turns to her hair, in which was still slightly damp from her shower. El reaches for the hair gel Nancy had purchased for her. "*All you have to do is let your hair get a little dry after a shower, then you take a bit of this, and scrunch it into your hair*", Nancy's voice rings out in her head.

So, El follows the directions of the girl who had styled her hair perfectly for the snowball, crimping some of the gel into her wavy hair.

Once she's done, she takes the same barrette that had been in her hair at the snowball and clips back her growing hair.

A proud smile grows on her face as she watches her hair bounce lightly this way and that. She can't help but feel immensely happy that her hair has begun to grow out. It doesn't curl as tightly as it used to when it was first growing out, but now has a more tamed curl to it, and she loves it.

With a small bit of makeup that Nancy had also bought for her. El stares at herself one last time, and she only hopes Mike and the rest of his family thinks she looks good enough. '*Normal*', rings through her mind.

A knock at her door startles her, she turns quickly, meeting Hopper. He's smiling brightly at her. "Wow, you've done really well with your hair and make-up, Nancy taught you well".

El flushes at his words, "Thank you" she grins at him. He nods towards the living room, "Come on, we're going to be late if we don't leave now".

She all but speeds by him at his words as she heads to put on her winter jacket and gloves, Hopper mimicking her.

"Ready?" he asks.

El nods determinedly, "Yes, ready", and with that they head out the door and into the cool night, making their way towards Hopper's cruiser, and their next destination.

He's pretty sure he's sweated through his shirt by now as he desperately tries to calm the atrocity that is his wild hair.

He's been getting ready for hours, much longer than he needed to get ready for the night. For once his room was spotless, and he had even helped his mom clean the living room. Which got him a suspicious look.

But, after the distractions of getting the house ready, he only had himself to worry about, in which he felt an even tighter knot twist in his stomach.

"Mike?" a knock comes through the bathroom door. He huffs, "What

Nancy?" he asks back.

"You almost ready? Mom's wondering where you are" she says.

Mike growls to himself, "I'll be out in a minute, my stupid hair is cooperating", he states as he tries dejectedly once again to smooth down his obnoxious curls.

He hears his sister laugh through the door. "Stop worrying so much, your hair always looks the same no matter what you do".

His hands freeze, his fingers stopping mid pat of his untameable curls. His eyes lock onto his reflections. '*She's right*', his voice of reasoning echoes through his mind.

He slumps, shaking his head one more time, before moving towards the bathroom door. Opening it to find Nancy giving him a once over.

She gives him a smile, "See, you look great, El's going to think you look so handsome" she coos as she pulls at his flannel, straightening it once more.

He only nods and whispers a quick "Thanks" as they make their way down the stairs.

The smell of tonight's dinner has been wafting up the stairs for hours, but now his stomach rumbles at the delicious scent that hits him all at once. For, he had only had breakfast, too worried to eat anything in the middle of the day.

"Don't you two look nice!" his mother's voice rings from the kitchen, as he and Nancy make their way in.

Mike freezes as his mom comes to inspect him. He tries to move away, "Mom, come on, I'm fine" he growls as he attempts to get out of her grasp.

"Oh, I know Michael, it's just you look so cute, all dressed up for your little girlfriend" she teases, finally pulling away.

Nancy laughs behind him, and he can feel his face flare. "Mom!" he groans, as she tosses a hand at him.

"You're too worried, I've already met her" his mom dictates as she pulls tonight's meatloaf from the oven.

Mike rolls his eyes, "Not *really*" he stresses as he begins to pace about the kitchen. His eyes flick to the nearby clock on the wall, where it reads, five fifty-five. His breath catches in his throat as he knows El and Hopper will be here any minute.

"She seemed like a lovely girl, I don't know what you're so worried about" his mom says as she gives him a questioning look.

"If only you knew" he mutters under his breath.

"Mike, set the table why don't you?" his mom states as she finishes tossing the salad.

"Alright" he says as he moves to grab the nice plates from his mother's prized hutch, and moves to set the table.

Just as he finishes setting the last fork, his mom quickly approaches with the cut up meatloaf and sets it firmly on an oven mitt.

"There, perfect!" his mom chirps, clapping her hands together, and smiling brilliant.

Mike wants to roll his eyes, but a knock at the door caused him to freeze.

His mom turns to him, "Oh, looks like they're here! Mike go answer the door!" she shoos him away.

He can barely walk in a straight line as he makes his way to the forya. He moves his hand to take ahold of the cool door handle. Taking in one last deep breath, he pulls open the door.

And there, the most beautiful girl he has ever laid eyes on stands. She shys slightly as their eyes meet.

"Hi Mike" she squeaks, a warm grin spreading across her face.

"Uh...uhm..." his words fail him, and he already finds himself the biggest idiot of the night.

"You going to invite us in, or just stare at El all night?" Hopper's gruff voice shakes Mike from his stupor.

He feels his face warming even more so as he stands to open the door and move out of the way. "Uh, sorry. Please come in" he directs them with his arm, and both Hopper and El enter.

They shrug off their jackets, and Mike reaches to take them. Hopper shuffles into the house more, giving he and El some more space.

He hangs the jackets and then turns to see El looking up at him expectantly. He decides to not sputter like an idiot this time, "El" he breathes as the corners of his mouth creep up slowly. "You look amazing" he says quietly as he approaches her and reaches out to touch her arm.

Her smile grows even more, "Thank you, and you look really handsome" her eyes sparkle back at him.

All he wants to do is wrap her up in a tight embrace, because she truly does look amazing. The pale purple dress matches her complexion perfectly, and her hair and make-up are just as mesmerizing.

He takes a tentative step forward, and she does too, reaching for one another. But, before they can embrace, a voice breaks them apart.

"Hello!" his mom saunters into the forya, and Mike wants nothing more to do then bury himself in embarrassment as his mom approaches El.

He watches as El's eyes widen in surprise as his mom moves towards her and envelops her in a hug.

Mike doesn't believe he's ever seen his mom warm up so quickly to someone, and El looks incredibly startled.

His mom finally pulls back. "Look at you! Aren't you a pretty little one!" she grins brightly at El, whose face reddens in embarrassment.

"Uhm, thank you" she manages to croak out from her surprise as his mom finally backs off to give her some space.

She turns to look over her shoulder, "Ted, come meet Mike's girlfriend!" she calls into the living room. And Mike's pretty sure his heart jumps into his throat at her words.

He quickly turns to give El a look and finds her already staring back, each with their own sheepish looks.

Mike hears grumbling from the living room as his dad finally walks out to meet them in the forya.

His mom reaches for his dad and pulls him close, "Ted, this is El, Mike's girlfriend" her voice is filled with giddiness.

He gazes at his dad who does a once over of El, taking her all in. And, he sees him squint slightly at her. It's almost as if he's processing something...trying to remember, something.

But, Hopper seems to notice this too and he clears his throat, "El, I know you're nervous, but why don't you introduce yourself" he gives the girl a look who nods, and pulls out a small smile all while holding out her hand.

"Hello, Mr. Wheeler, it's nice to meet you" she says in her most tender voice in which Mike's pretty sure calms him to a 't'.

His dad snaps out of his stare and then nods appreciatively as he sticks out his own hand, and they meet in the middle, shaking hands for just a moment. "It's nice to meet you too El" his dad affirms, in which takes Mike back slightly.

El moves to stand beside Mike, and he interlaces their hands together, trying to convey calmness into both of them. She returns a gentle squeeze.

His mom claps her hands in front of her, "Well, we've done enough standing around. Mike, why don't you show our guests to the dining room?"

He nods to his mom and then turns to the girl beside him, "Come on" he gives her a quick smile, as he pulls her along.

The butterflies that have continuously hummed in his stomach decide

to settle for a moment, which relieves him.

He steps into the dining room, El right beside him, as Hopper and his dad follow suit.

"Hopper, that seat's for you", he gestures to one of the ends of the table, as his dad approaches the other end.

"Thanks Mike" he says gruffly as he shuffles over to the end, while Mike pulls out the chair beside Hopper and himself. El flashes him a brilliant smile as he guides her into her chair, and then moves to sit beside her.

Just then, Nancy enters the room, guiding his youngest sister. "Come on Holly" she instructs Mike's youngest sister to follow. The young girl toddles into the room, as Nancy helps her get into her booster seat.

Mike watches as the young girl's eyes settle directly on El, as she points directly at her, "Who, she?" she turns to Nancy who sits beside her.

Nancy falters slightly, but recovers quickly, "Oh, that must be El, Mikey's girlfriend".

Mike blushes at his sister's old nickname for him, and he here's a giggle beside him. He quickly turns his head to look at El, who is trying to hold in her laughter, while she covers her mouth.

"Mikey?" she whispers to him, and he's pretty sure his red cheeks turn redder in that moment.

He lets out a long sigh, "Yes, it's an old nickname".

El tucks her lips together to try not to laugh anymore, as Mike directs his attention anywhere else that will not cause him immediate embarrassment.

And thankfully, his mom walks in, carrying her famous meatloaf, as she places it gently in the center of the table. The mound of meat steams, the delicious aroma wafting about, as it joins the other food dishes on the table.

"Perfect!" his mother chirps, as she takes off her oven mitts, and then moves to sit beside his dad and Nancy.

"Alright everyone, dig in!" and Mike is more than happy to direct his attention to the meal before him.

She honestly couldn't help laughing at Nancy's nickname for her boyfriend. She actually found it quite endearing. She decided to put that little thought into the back of her mind for future use.

It was even more adorable to watch as Mike turned about fifty shades of red in embarrassment, as he tried to direct his attention away from her.

Even though she wanted to comment, she decided to leave the boy alone, and instead her eyes fell onto Mike's mom, Karen, as she strolled into the dining room, carrying a large steaming dish.

Her eyes widen as she sees the steaming entree being placed before her. She *rarely* got home cooked meals from Hopper. She swept her eyes across the table as she spotted bowls of various vegetables and a plate of steaming rolls. Her stomach growled, not realizing how hungry she actually was.

"El, hand me your plate dear and I'll cut you a piece of meatloaf" Karen instructed her as El hesitantly handed her plate over to the beaming woman.

Once a slice was on her plate, Karen handed it back to her, and moved about the table, starting with Hopper.

She felt a nudge beside her and she turned to the boy beside her, "Peas?" he asks handing her the bowl of the little round, green vegetable that she was not too fond of.

She swallows heavily as she takes the bowl, attempting to smile. She can feel a pair of eyes on her, and she turns to look at Hopper who is giving her a tentative look.

El attempts to communicate her disdain to her adopted father, but he stares at her, then the bowl of peas, and nods. She can't help but let

out a huff of breath as she slowly takes a spoonful of peas and places it next to her meatloaf. Quickly handing it off to Hopper, who is giving her a tight smile.

Mike then turns to her, handing her the plate of rolls and she can see he's now trying not to laugh at her. "What?" she hisses at him annoyingly. "Didn't know you didn't like peas" he teases, and she kicks him lightly under the table, causing him to let out a snort of laughter.

She rolls her eyes at her boyfriend, although she allows a small smile to pull at her lips as she helps herself to a roll. As the rest of the food gets passed around the table.

Once everyone is settled, the sound of forks and knives scraping against the plates begins to fill the room.

El, is delighted by the taste of the meatloaf, fresh made rolls and potatoes. She picks at her peas, which she discovers, are not mushy and tasteless like the ones in the t.v dinners. But, instead they pop in her mouth and leave a sweet aftertaste, and she decides that they are not too bad.

There is only a bit of small talk at the table, which she can't help but find a little weird. An uncomfortable feeling rises within her, but she desperately tries to squash it.

She feels a light tap against her foot, and she tilts her head slightly to see Mike is eyeing her out of the corner of his eye, he gives her a small smile. She returns one, and feels slightly more at ease.

It seems as if Karen senses her relaxation, for she finally throws a question in her direction. "So, El, tell us about yourself" her voice is soft and endearing.

El freezes slightly, but then she remembers the many conversations with Hopper and Mike about how to engage in small talk. So, she begins to rattle off the first things that come to her mind, "I like eggos, soap operas, playing games and...Mike" she casts her eyes in the boys general direction, and she sees his cheeks flare, as a smile plays on his lips.

"That's sweet! I love watching soap opera's too, they're addicting!" she points a fork in her direction, and El eases into the conversation because it's a topic she can actually relate to.

"Yes, lots of drama" she laughs lightly and Karen nods in agreement, "Oh, but that's why they're so fun to watch!"

El nods eagerly at this, and opens her mouth to continue to speak on the matter, however, Karen cuts her off with another question "And, how are you liking Hawkins so far?"

El stumbles slightly, and she nods dumbly, her words not forming well within her mind on this question, "Oh..uhm, it's...it's nice here", she tries to smile, but it falls limp on her face as she turns her head downwards trying to avoid the woman's eyes.

"That's good. It's a small town, but the boys always find things to do. Has Mike taken you anywhere?" she asks.

This time while she looks up, her eyes flick over to Mike's and he raises an eyebrow at her. Her mind quickly jumps to the first thing that pops into her head, "Uh, the arcade?" it comes out more as a question than she means, but she feels accomplished that she got something out at all.

Karen nods at her, "That's nice. But, Mike you should take her around more, like to the park or something" she suggests. Mike coughs a bit at her comment, "Don't worry mom, I've got a lot of plans for El", he turns and gives her a bright smile.

Nancy tries to hold back a giggle from across the table, but fails, as she quickly looks down at her plate, picking at her food. For some reason, the comment and the way Nancy responds makes El feel hot, and she's sure her face had gone red.

Hopper now clears his throat before he speaks, "Yeah, well, we've got a busy spring ahead for us".

"Really? What do you have planned?" Mike's dad, Ted, finally speaks. El finds this weird since any other conversations seem to fall flat as he didn't respond to any earlier questions unless asked directly.

El turns to Hopper, who is finishing up his last bite, wiping his mouth and nodding before he speaks, "Oh, just stuff" he shrugs.

Ted nods at this, as he picks around at the food on his plate as well. He rests his fork down and then stares directly back at Hopper, "So, how did you find out about your daughter anyways, Hopper? I thought you only had one?"

And there. Her anxiety spikes through the roof, and she can feel the stiffness of everyone else in the room begin to rise as well. It's the question everyone was waiting for, but secretly hoping no one would ask. But, she knew deep down that it would be Mike's dad who would be pushing this secret to the surface.

She shifts slightly so that out of the corner of her eye, she meets Hopper's. His are cool and calm, like always. He's assessing her, making sure she's ready. She knows that he has told her over and over again that this was *her* decision.

Right now though, she was scared out of her mind and she honestly didn't know how to respond. She wanted to run away and hide, to get out of this situation as fast as possible.

But, then she feels a gentle hand take hers, and she quickly flicks her head over to the boy beside her. Their dark eyes meet, and she can see his speaking clearly to her '*It's okay*', is what she sees. She begins to breath like Hopper taught her, and with a reassuring squeeze from Mike's hand, she nods to him.

She turns her head back to Hopper and nods.

He nods back and begins to gather his plate, "Actually, Karen, Ted, we wanted to talk to you about that, but why don't we get the table cleaned up and we can talk in the living room?" he suggests as he reaches for her own plate.

Ted and Karen startle slightly at his words. They move their heads to look at one another with surprised expressions.

Karen looks back to Hopper, "Okay, but...is everything alright? This seems...serious".

Hopper sighs, "Yeah well, it kind of is, and I'd rather have the kids feel more comfortable, so, let us help you get cleaned up".

Karen and Ted don't move, but Mike does, and Nancy follows, as they begin to gather the plates around them.

El can feel the intensity in the room rise in that moment. She only knows this will be an interesting conversation.

Hopper's POV

He couldn't honestly believe how well dinner was going. He was impressed by how well El had introduced herself to Mike's parents. Although, he did worry slightly when Ted had taken a bit more interest in El when he first laid eyes on her. He couldn't help but feel deep down in his gut, that, Ted had recognized El, and he was trying to place it.

But, with a quick redirection, the thought seemed to have fallen from his mind as he moved on.

Dinner was much quieter than he had expected as well. For, he figured a typical family of five would have a lot to discuss. However, maybe with two more guests, conversations fell a bit flat. But, he didn't really care. Because deep down, he was hoping a particular question wouldn't pop up tonight, and the conversation could be put on hold for just a little longer.

However, it seemed that he jinxed himself, especially when Ted had asked about how El had even come into his life. And he knew right then and there that the conversation was destined to happen tonight whether he liked it or not.

He could feel El's anxiousness beside him. And that's why he gave her one last look, silently asking her if this conversation was okay to have. Slightly relieved, she nodded her head, and he knew it was now or never.

So, that's where he now found himself, standing in the middle of the living room, a box labeled *Hawkins Lab*, placed on the coffee table.

All while El and Mike sat in a loveseat together. While Mike's parents sat on the larger sectional.

Once dinner had been cleared, he had directed the Wheeler's into the comfortable living room, hoping the atmosphere would be better here.

"So" Hopper claps his hands together and tries to make eye contact with Ted and Karen the best he could, but even being the chief of police, he still felt anxious in this moment. They both stare at him tentatively waiting for him to talk.

"As you know, El is living with me" he starts off, Ted gives him a '*No duh*' look, while Karen nods sympathetically.

"Well, there's a really long story that goes along with how I came to adopt her, and it has nothing to do with the rumors that have been circulating around town".

"You mean, she's not your daughter?" Ted's voice drones.

Hopper shakes his head, "No. Not biologically at least, I just recently adopted her" and at this he turns and gives the girl a smile, she returns it as he moves to stand so that he is between the two couches.

"But, her story is an interesting one, and we've all discussed that since Mike and El are together and some...things have settled down. We all agreed that you should hear the truth about El and her past" he tries to keep his voice even.

Ted sits up straighter on the couch and Karen wrings her hands within her dress. She gives him a worried look, "Is everything okay?" she asks anxiously.

Hopper shrugs his shoulders, "Uh, yes and no, but before we start this long winded story, you both have to promise that what is said here, stays here".

Ted and Karen turn to look at one another, and then Ted turns to look at him, folding his arms together, "And if we don't?"

This takes Hopper back slightly, not really sure how to answer, but

then Mike's voice is heard in the large room, "Then she will have to go far away, and she might be in extreme danger" his words a firm and true.

He turns to look at the teen, who has a look of fierce determination across his face, as he holds onto El's hands firmly. They are sitting so close to one another it looks like they have melded together.

Mike's parents stare at their son with wide eyes. "You have to understand that this *is* serious, I don't want anything bad to happen to El, but we don't want to lie to you either" Mike continues to explain.

Karen gives her son a soft smile and relaxes into her seat more, nodding at his comment. Ted falls back onto the couch and lets out a huff of air, "Alright, fine, let's hear what you have to say" he does a sweeping motion with his hands to let them know to continue.

Hopper nods, but then looks to Mike, who is staring back at him, "Okay kid, why don't you start".

Mike takes a deep breath, and begins his story.

Mileven POV

He's not sure how his parents will take his story, heck, he's not even sure they will believe it, but he has to try and hope that they understand.

He can feel both of El's hands gripping onto his left hand, while he tries to wipe the sweat off of his right.

"Uhm, so remember a year and a half ago? And that whole stuff with me keeping a girl in the basement?" he tries to not sound unsure, but that's how it comes out.

He watches as his parent's straighten in their seats, both nodding. "Well-" he turns to El and smiles, "That was El" he breathes.

"I knew she looked familiar!" his dad springs his back up from the couch and points at the girl beside him. He can feel her tense.

Moving his thumb in small circular motions he tries to reassure her, all while keeping his eyes fixed onto his parents.

"Yes, she used to have no hair, but obviously it's grown out".

His mom shakes her head, "But...Mike how, why...?" she tries to ask, but he knows a million questions are probably running through her mind.

Mike lets out a long breath, "It's best if I start at the beginning, and how El and I even met".

His parent's still sit erect in their seats, but his mom nods slowly, "Okay, start there then".

With a long inhalation, he begins to tell the story of how he and the boys first met El.

He explains how they had gone out to look for Will, and his mom berates him slightly, telling him that he shouldn't have gone out there. Mike tries to not roll his eyes, as he continues on with the story.

He starts with how the sky had opened up and was down pouring on them in the forest while they searched for Will.

He then went on to how they had discovered El, in just a t-shirt, soaked to the bone, afraid, cold and tired. How Mike's heart broke at seeing her wandering the woods like a lost child. So, he had offered her his jacket and he had brought her home to make sure she was okay.

Mike watched as his parents leaned in towards him as he continued on with the story. How he had given El his clothes, and their elaborate plan to tell his mom about her.

"And why didn't you?" his mom asks. Mike holds up a hand, "I'm getting there". So, he continued his story about how he was going to have El knock on the door and ask for help, but she explained to him that bad people were after her and that they were all in danger.

His mom's mouth dropped open in shock, "In danger, what do you

mean?" her voice escalates.

To his surprise El jumps in, "Because-" she starts and she freezes slightly when all the eyes in the room settle on her. But, with a deep breath in she continues, "Because, when I first escaped, Benny took me in. He called someone for help, but the bad men came and killed him instead, so I ran" her voice waivers and Mike moves his arm to wrap it securely around his girlfriends back.

He knows she's trying to fight off the tears. She raises her head confidently and then looks directly at his parents, "I didn't want what happened to Benny to happen to Mike...or any of you" she says tearfully.

At her words, his mom's expressions softens even more so as she raises a hand to place it gently on her chest.

Mike moves his hands up and down El's back as a stray tear cascades down her cheek, he looks back at his parent's, who's expressions are much more solemn.

"That's the day I stayed home, I was just looking after El. Making sure she felt comfortable" he shrugged his shoulders as his mom lit up, "Oh, so *that's* why you stayed home".

"Yeah. And then things kind of just got crazier from there", he looks up at Hopper and then El, who has settled into his embrace.

He lets out a quick breath, "You see, El was raised in a lab, *Hawkins Lab*, she was stolen away from her mother and treated like a lab rat".

His mom gasps, her sharp breath startling them. "What in the world would they want with El?" his dad finally speaks, moving forward, resting his arms on his knees.

"You see, El's name from the lab was Eleven, but I gave her the nickname, El. Her birth name is Jane" his voice is soft as his parent's continue to listen.

"But that doesn't explain why Hawkins Lab would want her" his mom exaggerates.

Mike nods vigorously, "I know, I haven't gotten there-" but he's cut off by Hopper who moves to open the box before them.

"It's all in here" the older man says as his parent's move to peek inside the old box.

His dad is the first to reach in and pull out a file, he flips through it carefully. "Experiments? Like, they believed people had some weird...extrasensory powers?" he asks skeptically as his eyes rake over the words.

"That's just it though. It's not fake" Hopper's voice is deep and even. Mike watches as his dad gives Hopper an uneasy look.

"Ted, look!" she says as she points to a file. They both gaze at it, and then move their heads to look at El.

His mom holds up the file, and there Mike sees a younger picture of El, just as he had first met her.

"Is this you?" she questions.

El nods silently, her mouth drawn in tight.

His mom sets down the file shaking her head, "But, it says here that she was the daughter of Terry Ives, who was part of some-" she starts, but Hopper cuts in, "Yeah, Terry was part of this experiment that Dr. Brenner was doing, she didn't realize she was pregnant with El at the time", he stops short, his gaze moving to El's. "She had no idea that her own daughter would develop something special from the experiments".

"Something special?" Mike's dad quips. And Mike feels El tense once again in his arms, because he knows this is where they had discussed El showing off her powers, and showing them exactly what she could do.

Mike squeezes her, getting her attention, she turns to look at him, her rich brown eyes bore into his dark ones, and he can see that she's scared.

"Don't worry" he whispers to her, as he holds her close.

He turns back to his parents whose eyes find his, "El's really special, and...she wants you guys to see what she can do".

With his last words, he releases his arm from around the girl beside him, and her eyes quickly search his face.

He gives her a bright smile, before nodding encouragingly, "It's okay, I'm right here". He watches as she swallows nervously before turning towards his parents who are watching her cautiously.

She can feel the tension rise in the room as her own heartbeat begins to race within her chest. So far, she's felt that the evening has gone by without fault. But, this part is what she's been the most worried about.

She had no idea how Mike's parents would react to her powers. *'Would they call her a freak? Would they call the lab to come and get her?'* these were the unsure voices trailing through her head at this moment.

But, beside her she could feel Mike's steadiness, her one true anchor that she's had since the day they met. And it's all she needs.

Turning her head upwards, she makes quick eye contact with each of Mike's parents before she holds out her right arm, and aims it towards the box sitting on the table before them. Using her powers for things like this have become less strenuous, her nose doesn't even bleed with short stunts.

As easy as breathing comes to her, she lets her powers go, as she begins to move the box. It begins to levitate, and then she commands it to come to her, it lands gently at her feet. It's quick and simple, but it's enough to make anyone believe.

Cautiously she raises her eyes and she finds she is met with the very surprised looks of Mike's parents.

Karen looks startled, while Ted's mouth hangs open in shock, she doesn't know what to make of their reactions. So, she folds her hands back up into her lap. Only to be covered immediately by Mike's. She

turns to look at him, and sees a proud expression written across his face. She relaxes slightly.

"What...what was that?" Karen's voice croaks from across the room, El slowly looks at her.

Hopper jumps in to answer, "She's telepathic. She can move things with her mind, control things, and even...can connect to different dimensions".

No one says a word as a silence hangs over the room. Ted finally removes his glasses and wipes them against his shirt, he shakes his head, "Did...did I *really* just see that?" he seems to not trust his own words as he puts his glasses back on.

Hopper nods, "Yes, she's a special kid. And the lab wanted her to use as some sort of spying weapon, they didn't treat her well there" his voice drops, and El's stomach tightens at his words.

"What do you mean?" Karen questions.

This time, El finds her voice, "I was kept alone, for many years" she starts as all eyes are on her once again. She feels the reassuring squeeze of Mike's hand.

"I'd never ventured outside the lab, I didn't know what *living* was" she swallows. "I didn't know there was a world outside of my four walls, or that what was being done to me was wrong".

She can feel the tears pricking at the corner of her eyes as she finds Karen's gaze on her. The woman's face falls, and El can see the sadness washing over her.

"If I didn't do what they asked they..." her voice falters slightly, "They would...lock me in a room for hours, days sometimes. They would withhold food, anything to get me to do what they wanted".

It's silent for a moment, when, Karen finally stands, which causes panic to rise in El, especially when her direction is aimed directly at her. She freezes in her spot.

It feels like an eternity for his mom to make it towards her, before

she lowers herself to the floor in front of El. She slowly raises her arms and takes El's hands within hers, El's eyes move up slowly meeting Karen's.

She can see the tears starting to trickle down the older woman's face as she squeezes El's hand, "You *poor*, sweet girl" her voice warbles, and El can feel the empathy behind the words.

"To be treated that way...and to go through that...I couldn't even imagine" she shakes her head in disbelief.

Karen then takes one of her hands and places it directly on El's cheek, her eyes widen at the touch. "You have nothing to worry about with us, your secret is ours" she gives her a wide, watery smile.

And now, El can feel the tears escaping from her eyes, as she hears Karen's words. The emotion behind the words mean everything to her, and she can't believe how wonderful it feels to be accepted.

Without even thinking, El moves forward and as if anticipating her movements, Karen opened her arms and brings El to her in a tight hug.

"Thank you" is all El can sob into the women's shoulder, as Karen squeezes her tightly.

The tightness in the room finally breaks in the hug, and El feels the relief wash over her.

Eventually, El pulls away from Karen, both flashing each other watery smile as Karen moves to stand and moves back to join Ted on the other couch.

El then immediately turns to Mike and gives him a tight hug, which he eagerly returns. "We did it" she whispers into his ear, she hears Mike's breathy laugh before he says, "No, *you* did it El" and she's so excited she places a quick kiss on the boys cheek, before breaking apart, keeping their hands interlaced.

"So, are we good with everything then?" Hopper's voice cuts through the living room, although El notices his attention falls onto Ted mostly.

Mike's dad turns to look up at Hopper, he heaves a heavy sigh, "I still got a lot of questions" he shakes his head. Hopper laughs at this, before Karen rises one again, "Why don't we talk more in the kitchen, I'll get some coffee going, let the kids have some time" she gestures to El and Mike, smiling.

Hopper nods to this as all the adults stand to leave the living room leaving Mike and El alone, they finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Hopper's POV

He finally allows a long breath to escape him as he follows Karen and Ted out of the living room and into the kitchen. He couldn't believe how quickly Mike's parents seemed to accept El and her peculiarity. *'Well, at least Karen did'*, he says to himself.

Hopper steadies himself on one of the nearby stools, as Karen busy's herself around the kitchen, getting the coffee maker ready. While Ted stands across from Hopper, both hands pressed against the kitchen counter as he keeps his head lowered.

He knows that this will be near impossible for the oldest male Wheeler to accept, but Hopper feels as if he can't leave tonight without making sure he's on the same page too.

"She's not some Russian spy, right?" Ted's voice is muffled as he continues to look down at the ground.

He doesn't mean to laugh, but he does, and his action causes Ted to finally relax his hands and look directly at him. Hopper waves a hand at him, "Sorry, didn't mean to laugh, but she's fourteen! She was kept in a lab! You really think she even knew what she was doing, let alone she was working *for* Hawkins lab, so she's obviously not Russian".

Ted lets air out of his nose quickly as he shakes his head, "I...just don't know who to believe anymore" he shrugs his shoulders.

Karen then moves towards them, two steaming mugs of coffee are placed before them. "Thanks" Hopper quips before moving the bitter

drink towards his mouth and takes a slow drink.

"The people who came to our house last year told us she was dangerous, so we believed them" she explains to Hopper with a sad expression.

He shakes his head, "Those lab bastards would say anything to make sure El ended up back in their hands. Even if it meant making a twelve year old girl look like the enemy".

Karen nods her head at this, "It's awful, what they did to her".

Hopper takes another sip of his coffee, enjoying the fresher taste than what his usually has. "She's got a lot to learn" he sighs.

"She's been deprived of so much, the poor girl" she hums as she plays with the handle of her own coffee mug.

"That's why we needed to let you in on who she was, I want to introduce her to the world, but I need to know she has other people she can trust and go to" Hopper explains looking at the Wheelers.

"Do others know?" Ted asks with a low voice.

He nods, "Yes, Joyce, Mike's friends-" and he's cut off by another voice, "Me too".

All heads turn towards the eldest Wheeler child who is smiling as she enters the kitchen. "Holly's asleep" she nods up the stairs while her parents look at her wide eyed.

"You knew too!" her mother quips at her and Nancy nods, "Yes, she's the one that found Barb and Will" she explains.

Karen sighs heavily, "It seems I don't even know what's going on with my own kids nowadays".

"It was a secret I asked them to keep" Hopper explains looking at Karen directly.

She sighs, not speaking.

He turns his attention back to Ted, "I need to know if you're going to keep this secret, or do I need to be worried that lab agents will be knocking on my door in an hour after we leave?" his voice is serious and firm.

Ted turns towards him with a skeptical look, "You really think I'd do that?"

Hopper nods, "Yes, I would" his face is stone.

No one speaks for a moment before Ted shakes his head, "No, I won't say anything, she's safe here" he says evenly.

"Good!" Nancy chirps, surprising the adults around them, as they give her a questioning look.

She rolls her eyes as she tiptoes over towards the corner that connects to the living room, "Because, if you said no, and Hopper and El had to disappear, you'd be losing your son as well" she singsongs.

"What?!" Ted sputters as he moves towards his daughter.

"I mean, if El left tomorrow, Mike wouldn't be too far behind, you'll never be able to separate those two again" she sports a knowing grin before peeking into the living room.

And at this Hopper, Karen and Ted move quietly as they approach the corner that Nancy is peeking over.

Hopper's eyes trail into the living room where he spots the two teens, cuddled up on the couch. Mike's sitting with his legs hanging off the couch, his side supported by the arm rest. While El has her legs tucked up on the couch, as her head lays firmly against Mike's chest, his arms wrapped firmly around her. Their eyes closed as they lay fast asleep.

The intimate moment scares Hopper slightly, but it also relaxes him, knowing that his new daughter has such a protective person in her life. And also, now, a family who accepts her.

Karen sighs at the sight as they all pull away from the corner "How adorable are they?!" she coos.

"I never thought Michael would ever find a girl" Ted huffs as he moves back into the kitchen.

Nancy swats him, "Dad, don't be mean".

"Well, we will definitely have to keep our eyes on them" Karen sports a secret smile as she places her mug in the kitchen sink.

Hopper nearly chokes on his coffee he tries to finish at her remark.

Both Nancy and Karen giggle at him. "Oh geez, this isn't going to be easy" he mutters as he rubs his head, knowing a headache isn't far behind.

Mileven POV

He watches as his parent's and Hopper migrate into the kitchen. The overwhelming feeling of exhaustion washes over him, as he relaxes back onto the couch, El follows him.

"I can't believe that went over so well" he lets out a long breath. El giggles, poking him in the side, "I'm glad it did, your parent's are sweet" she gives him a brilliant smile.

His face softens as he looks at the beautiful girl beside him. "Did I tell you how amazing you looked tonight?" the words stumble out of his mouth before he can catch them, surprising himself at his boldness.

El reddens at his words as she ducks her head embarrassed, "Yes, you did".

"But, I never got to say how handsome you looked" she gives him a shy look, and now it's his turn for his face to redden.

She startles him when she reaches forward and places a gentle hand on his cheek, "I like it when you get all red" she jokes.

"Heh, you do it too" he says sweetly as he reaches his own hand out and places it against her cheek.

Like magnets, their eyes are on one another, and the feeling in the

room changes. He watches as her eyes flicker between his eyes and his mouth, he knows he's doing the same thing with her.

With how tense and nervous they had been all night, the last thing on their mind was getting to spend time alone, and now that they were, a different feeling sparked within both of them.

As if the raised adrenaline from everything ignited a spark within them, they waste no time in bringing each other closer as their lips meet together in the middle.

Electricity flows through them both as their mouths connect, and Mike wants her closer, to make sure she knows just how much she means to him. He shifts his arms, moving one behind her head and the other behind her back. While El moves her free hand so that she is cupping his face, and now she is almost on top of him.

Mike moves his head, shifting the angle of their mouths, their lips only breaking apart for a millisecond before reconnecting once again. He feels El hum against his lips at the satisfaction, and he melts right there and then, as they continue to move together.

Eventually, they break apart, but only move so that a breath can escape between them.

He's known it for a long while now, but he knows it's too soon to say it, and it's not the right moment, so he says what he hopes will convey how he feels to the girl who changed his life.

"El?" he whispers. "Yes?" she answers back in the same hushed tone.

He takes a deep breath before speaking his next words, "You mean everything to me" and he makes sure the emotions of his words are true.

El's face softens at his words, and he can see a stray tear escape her eye as she nuzzles close to him, "You mean everything to me too, Mike".

And she cuddles even closer to him. Pulling her legs up onto the couch, as she lays her head on his chest, while he wraps his arms tightly around her.

In that moment, Mike knows everything is perfect. And he wouldn't change it for the world. Not when he had the girl he knew he loved tucked deeply into his embrace.

They didn't need words to convey their feelings for one another, they just needed the others presence to know how much they cared.

And with a smile on his face, Mike and El sit in a comfortable silence, allowing their closeness and warmth to lull them to a peaceful sleep.

Alright! So, what did you think of the combined POV's for this chapter? It was definitely a lot easier and I'm secretly glad I don't have to go back through and literally rewrite the whole thing from a different perspective.

I hope this was okay too, I feel like it gets the point across without diving too deeply. Honestly, I think Ted would just be so oblivious to El's powers, and I know Karen would just love her too.

So, let me know what you think! I *might* get one more chapter in before SEASON 3 (AHHH!) but it would also be great to get some fresh ideas as well. I have another idea I'd like to throw in before I get to where I want to be caught up with the show, but we will see!

As always thank you so much for the advice last chapter!

And PLEASE REVIEW! I LOVE hearing from you all!

17 days! Season 3 can't come soon enough!

12. The Perils of Growing UP

Wow! Once again, thank you all for the beautiful reviews and feedback from the last chapter! They are always so appreciated! So, from what everyone has said, it seems the combined viewpoint is much better, so I will keep it going that way then :)

Like I said I'm hoping to have this chapter out before the third season comes because I have one more little thing I want to add in before I catch up with the next season so I can tie them together. I'm so excited!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things.

Hopper's POV

He couldn't believe how well the dinner had gone over. It seemed as if El had been officially welcomed into the family and Karen was getting wedding preparations ready for tomorrow.

He shakes his head at this thought as he focuses on the road before him. Karen had even said that El was more than welcome over to their house anytime. Of course, both the two love birds who had been awoken so that El could leave, were over the moon about Karen's declaration.

Since it was decided so quickly, Hopper didn't get a chance to lay down any ground rules. But then...his mind then began to race as he thought '*It isn't my house*'. And the thought scared him because that meant he would never really know that when El went over there if she and her boyfriend were being supervised.

The thought ran a shiver up his spine. For, since this whole arrangement began, he had full control over El's whereabouts and the knowings of who was to be at the cabin.

Now, however, if he allowed El over to the Wheeler's he had no idea how strict they were about having the two be alone. The thought alone terrified him.

But, then a voice echoed in his mind, '*I won't hurt her*', it was Mike's voice that reminded him of this.

He lets out a heavy sigh as the dad monster within him warred between all these new thoughts and feelings versus making sure he kept El safe. And that meant from anything.

"You okay?" El's tired voice asks from his side. He had almost forgotten that she was in the cruiser with him.

He does a double take looking at her. He can see the sleep heavy within her eyes as her once tight brown curls now begin to loosen and fall this way and that around her face.

"Uh, yeah, just tired. It was a long night" he states.

El hums in agreeance beside him, "But good though. I think Karen likes me" her voice is soft and filled with a light happiness.

She's turned towards the window, but in the reflection he can see the smile that dances on her face.

He nods his head in solace. "Yep, I think it went well" he agrees as he finally pulls into their long and winding driveway.

When he parks the car, El stretches in her seat before exiting the vehicle. They both walk tired steps up to the cabin as El nonchalantly releases the locks and the door swings open.

She removes her shoes and coat, giving a long yawn in return. She faces him as he hangs his coat, "I'm going to bed, tired" as she gives him a small smile.

Hopper chuckles, while ruffling her hair as she pushes away with an annoyed expression. "Night kid" he says as she turns giving him a small wave as she goes to her room.

He makes his way to the couch and sits, his mind whirling with the events of the night. He moves his head, examining the cabin.

Although the structure is sound, he can see how lonely this place could seem if someone were left alone in it for too long.

His blue eyes flick to El's door. He realizes just how small this place actually is, and being so far out, it's desolate.

He's then reminded of El's shivering body from a week ago when she exited her room wrapped in her blanket. Even though he tried his hardest to keep the damn cabin warm, it seemed the only comfortable place for warmth was the living room.

Then, he begins to think about how when he begins to introduce El to the town of Hawkins, her being out in the cabin alone was not the most comforting feeling. Honestly, he'd rather be back in town. Closer to work, and having a stronger feeling of relief knowing El was in driving distance. Not just that, but she'd be closer to her friends.

It seemed as if he already had his mind made up about the idea that had been ping ponging back and forth in his mind. He needed to move them. And he knew it would be better if he did it sooner rather than later.

He had sold his trailer back when he relocated himself and El in the cabin, and he had set that money aside, along with a tidy savings tucked away.

With a firm gust of air he blows through his nose, Hopper claps his hands into his lap, standing to his feet knowing his next plan of action. He was going to start looking for a new place, a new start, for his new family.

He spent the next couple of weeks pouring over the newspapers that came every Wednesday in the mail.

When he proposed the idea to his new daughter, she all but threw herself into his arms in excitement. Not long after she bulletted to her room, no doubt informing her friends.

What surprised him was how eager the other kids were about this new event in their lives. Especially a lanky, dark haired boy who seemed to be giving him new listings each and every day.

"This one is only a two minute bike from our house!" he exclaimed

one evening he and the rest of the party had trampled into his too small cabin.

The rest of the kids clutched at various house listings they had seen hanging at real estate offices and in the paper, as they swarmed him the moment he walked through the door. Of course, he had examined many of the ones they were shoving into his annoyed face, but he tried to keep his calm, knowing the kids were only trying to help.

"Kid, I already looked at that one!" he growled impatiently, breaking his reserve as the noise of the eager teens had finally pushed him to his limit.

He swiped the paper from the startled teens hands, crumpling it in return. "Apparently none of you realize that most of the houses you're showing me are out of my price range" he gives the now quiet teens all a beady look.

El moves to stand beside her boyfriend, looping her arm up through his, and interlocking it with her other hand, "You don't have to be so mean about it" she cocks an eyebrow up at him.

Their eyes locked onto one another, her look holding one that said *'Don't attack my boyfriend!'*

He gives an unceremonious eye roll as he huffs, rubbing his tired eyes with his thumb and pointer finger.

Breathing deeply he tries to keep his cool. Removing his fingers he sees the teens are still staring at him, "Look, I know you're all excited about this, and I do appreciate the help, but there are some places I'm already planning on looking at soon" he rationalizes with them.

"You didn't tell *me* that" El gave him an annoyed look.

No, he didn't tell her, and it was because he didn't want her getting her hopes up with the fact that a place that could either be close to Mike's house or still far away. He honestly didn't want her upset with the place he chose to be there home.

He huffs, "No, I didn't because I need to go look at them on my own".

"Why?" the fiery redhead of the group speaks up, which surprises him, he turns his gaze towards her.

"Yeah, why?" now the curly haired boy stands straighter crossing his arms in front of him.

He's pretty sure he's going to roll his eyes out of his head at this point, "Because it's an adult decision and El is going to be bored out of her mind coming with me. Besides, I need to integrate her slowly into town, I don't want a million people asking questions".

Most of the kids seem skeptical at his answer, but surprisingly the one person he expected to fight back, doesn't, instead she speaks calmly, "When are you going to look at them?" El's voice is even.

He narrows his eyes at her, because he knows she's planning something, he takes a step towards her, "Saturday, why?"

Her eyes perked up at this, and she turns to give a quick look to Mike beside her, who also gives her a look as well. Obviously, they have something planned, and he doesn't like it.

She flicks her eyes back to him, "Well..." she draws out, "Everyone wanted to have a movie marathon with the Star Wars movies this weekend" she begins to explain.

"Yeah, we haven't all watched them as a full complete party, it's part of being *in* the party" Dustin exclaims.

"So, I was going to ask you anyways, can I go over to Mike's on Saturday while you're out?" her light brown eyes widen as she tips her head downwards. Giving him, her famous puppy dog eyes.

To his astonishment over the last couple of weeks, El had not constantly nagged him to go over to Mike's house since she had gotten the okay from Karen. Instead the teens seemed to be plying against him and had been constantly arriving at the cabin. Whether it was just a couple of them, or the whole group, he was starting to become a little annoyed at their presence.

He's beginning to wonder if that was their plan from the beginning. Annoy him to no end so that when they asked him about this

weekend, he couldn't say no.

Truthfully, it would be easier for her to be somewhere and he wouldn't have to worry about her or the kids being alone at the cabin all day.

So, with a shake of his head, all while crossing his arms he stares El in the eyes. She waits for his answer with baited breath.

"Okay" he says and no sooner does he say it, El is squealing, holding onto Mike tighter, while the others cheer around them.

"Wait, wait, hold on there" he says raising both his hands to silence the teens, who stop mid celebration and turn to him with anticipation.

He looks to the boy who is holding onto his daughter, "Who's going to be there?" he lifts an eyebrow in question.

"My mom, Nancy, Holly...we aren't going to be unsupervised if that's what your asking" he says disjointedly.

Hopper nods his head, "Alright, I'll drop El off Saturday morning, but-!" he holds up a finger to all of them before they got too excited again, "You *all* know the rules with El being out. At Mike's you've got to remain there and no going beyond the culdesac" he reminds them and they all nod their heads in understanding.

"Don't worry Hop, we'll take good care of El" Max moves towards the girl and wraps her arm around her, both the girls light up.

He is actually happy to see this, for the girls seem to have grown closer in the last couple of weeks.

"Okay then, Saturday is settled then" and after he speaks the teens jump up and down in excitement to officially be able to have El out elsewhere other than the cabin.

Hopper sighs heavily as the teens continue their celebration, and he hopes he didn't make a mistake.

Mileven POV

She couldn't actually believe her luck at the fact that Hopper had agreed to letting her go to Mike's house. She had spent the last couple of weeks very hesitant to actually ask her new dad if she could to her boyfriend's house, worried about what his answer would be.

However, a couple of weeks ago, after he had announced that they would be looking for a new home closer into town, her excitement couldn't be contained. And of course, the first thing she did was radio Mike.

"Mike, Mike, come in, over!" she all but squeals into her supercom.

She waits in anticipation for a few beats but Mike's voice finally comes through. "Hey El, what's up?"

She squeezes the supercom within her hand tightly before she all but screams into the supercom, "Mike! Hopper says we're going to be moving to a new house that's closer in town!" she says the words so quickly, she's not sure if Mike catches it all, especially when he doesn't respond immediately.

"Wait" his voice finally breaks through, "You're telling me that Hopper's moving you two closer into town?!" he exasperates.

"Yes!" El cheers from her side, kicking her feet into her bed joyously.

"El, that's awesome! That means we'll probably be able to see each other more!" Mike exclaims.

"I know and I won't be so bored out here all alone" her voice becomes softer, more distant as she begins to reminisce about her solidarity that has been created due to being at the cabin so long.

"No, you won't because I'll make sure that I'd see you everyday" Mike's voice is tender and it makes El's heart melt.

"Aww, Mike you're so sweet. It would be amazing to see you everyday" she said dreamily.

"Yeah, and I think Hopper would finally give you a bit of a break as

well and let us take you places".

El hums in satisfaction, thinking of all the wonderful and new things she would finally be able to do with her friends. Like, going to the movies, or going swimming, or biking, the list was truly endless.

Mike's voice brought her back to reality, "I'm going to start looking for places for sale, and I'm going to try to find something that's as close as possible to mine" he declares.

El giggles into her device, "Okay, although I think Hopper might not be too happy with that" she jokes.

Mike returns her laugh, "No probably not, but it's worth trying."

A silence falls between their lines, "Anyways, have you talked to Hopper about a possible movie marathon soon?" Mike asks.

El pulls her lips in tight, afraid to answer because Mike and the others had been pestering her relentlessly about doing a Star Wars movie marathon at Mike's house. But, she knows how Hopper is, and even though she has Karen's permission to come over, she knows it's ultimately Hoppers decision.

"Uhm...not yet no...sorry" her voice falters slightly, and Mike immediately answers, "Don't worry about it El, it won't be for a couple weekends anyways, Dustin and Lucas both have things going on and we have to have the *whole* party together" his voice is reassuring, which allows El to relax her shoulders.

"Okay" she says softly.

"I hate to cut this short because you know I love talking to you, but my mom's calling, so I'll see you with the others, and I'll call you later okay?" Mike's voice sounds sad, and El can feel herself become disheartened knowing he has to go, but she tries to not sound it through the supercom.

"Alright, I'll talk to you later, bye Mike" she says sweetly and she can hear Mike's joyous voice on the other end, "Bye, El" and the line goes dead.

El flops her arm down onto her bed as she stares up at the plain wooden ceiling where cobwebs dust between the beams.

She gives a heavy sigh, feeling once again alone. She truly hopes that Hopper finds them a home soon because she would love to feel connected to her friends and not so isolated.

She also wishes that she will be able to go to Mike's for the movie marathon, but for now she lays in bed, closing her eyes and wishing it to be tomorrow so that she can see her friends once again.

However, she didn't have to suffer long when a few weeks later Hopper had announced that he would be going to look at a couple houses, and annoyingly to her, Hopper didn't want her tagging along.

Although disappointed at first, a new idea popped into her mind, and she figured she could possibly use it as leverage. So, she asked her new dad about the marathon, and she knew he couldn't say no.

And to her relief, Hopper had said yes to the movie marathon, and she couldn't wait to finally be able to get out of the cabin and spend time with her friends in the cramped cabin. Not just that, but Mike's basement had been her first actual 'home'. Her first place where she felt safe and she was eager to see it once again.

So, when she was awoken to the bright light of Saturday morning, she felt as if nothing could go wrong on this day.

But, she was sorely mistaken.

When she awoke she had felt fine at first, but as she began to get ready, a slight pain was protruding through her head, and a knot formed in her stomach.

After El had placed her sweatshirt over her head she rubbed at the headache that was beginning to form behind her skull. "No, no, no!" she growled at the incessant pain.

She had felt this way before, a couple of times actually. When she had first moved in with Hopper she had gotten sick with a nasty stomach bug, something she had never experienced in her life.

The throbbing headache and her swirling stomach were nothing compared to the vomiting that had come with it. The experience was something she never wanted to go through again. However, she had caught another bug and a couple of colds her first year in the cabin.

Hopper explained that since she hadn't had much exposure to the outside world she was more susceptible to getting sick. She hated his explanation because everytime she felt the sickness come on, she knew she would be miserable for days on end.

Now, it was the worst time for her to get sick, for she had been eagerly awaiting this day since the day she destroyed the demogorgon. She wanted to be back in her safe place, she wanted to be with her friends, with Mike.

She stood there for a couple minutes, massaging her temples, wishing the headache and stomachache to go away.

And, as if her wish was granted, the knot in her stomach disappeared, but her headache still persisted.

Allowing herself to take a minute and examine herself, she actually felt fine. She didn't have the queasiness that followed every time she had a stomach bug, nor did she have a stuffy nose like when she had a cold.

As quickly as the stomach pain had come, it vanished. And now all that remained was a headache.

"Weird" were the first words out of her mouth.

But, she didn't feel anything else, and was beginning to feel relieved. So, with a shrug of her shoulders, she went back to getting ready and headed out to the kitchen where Hopper had already placed a plate of eggs and toast, ready for her consumption.

Hearing her door open, Hopper, who was busying himself in the kitchen turned towards her, he flashed her a quick smile, "Morning" he says before he ducks into the fridge.

El attempts to play it cool as the headache still persisted in her head, but she didn't want Hopper calling off her day.

So, she seats herself in her chair and begins to dig into her meal, attempting to remain under the radar.

Hopper soon comes to sit across from her with his own plate, placing a bottle of ketchup between them. She slowly moves to grab the container and pours the sauce onto her eggs, a habit picked up by her boyfriend, which Hopper shudders at each time.

"You excited kid?" Hopper asks from across the table, and she only nods in return. This of course is a mistake, because the man immediately picks up on her lack of enthusiasm.

"El, you okay?" his worried dad voice kicks in, and although El doesn't meet his eyes, she can feel his on her.

She nods again, "Yes, everything's fine" she tries to add some emphasis on her words, but she falls short.

"Kid" Hopper's stern voice comes out, and El flinches, raising her head only slightly, peeking up to catch her dad's eyes.

"Yes" she whispers.

"Do you not feel good?" he asks and El huffs dropping her fork to her plate, and she can't help the tears that prick at her eyes, she takes in a quick breath, attempting not to cry.

"Hey, hey, easy there, tell me what's wrong?" Hopper says as he moves to kneel beside her.

El shakes her head, pressing her fists into her eyes, trying to control her tears. She sniffles, "No, you're going to tell me I can't go!"

She feels Hopper's large hand pressed against her back as he tries to soothe her, "You don't usually get this upset El, please just tell me what's wrong".

No, Hopper's right, she doesn't usually get this upset over things, she's more likely to yell and scream than cry. But, she wipes away her tears and pulls herself together, she turns her watery gaze on the man, he's giving her a sympathetic look waiting for her to speak.

She swallows her next breath before speaking, "I have a headache and you won't let me go if I'm sick," she sputters out, and she watches the man pull back slightly, a confused expression written across his face.

"You just have a headache?" he asks and El nods, wiping her nose with her nearby napkin.

He laughs at her shaking his head, and El immediately finds herself annoyed by this action, "Don't laugh!" she all but yells and Hopper's eyes are on her again, "Geez kid, when did you get so sensitive" she can see he's trying to hold back more laughter, but refrains.

Hopper stands to his feet and moves towards the bathroom. Her brown irises follow him. She can hear him rummaging around before coming back out. His right hand is fisted together, and he holds it out to her.

She moves her own hand out as her dad drops two pink colored items into her hand. She looks at them and she knows what it is immediately, for he just had to jam them down her throat every other time she was sick with a fever. She eventually obeyed and always felt better after she had taken them.

"Finish eating then take those, your headache will go away in a handful of minutes" he explains as he moves back to his own plate.

She gives him a look, and she knows he has interpreted it before, it says '*Explain!*'. Hopper rolls his eyes as he takes a bite of his food, "It's the same stuff I make you take for fevers, it works for headaches too".

Her eyes flicked down to the pink tablets and then back to him, "But...I thought you only take them when you're sick?"

Hopper shakes his head, "You're not sick, headaches happen from time to time. You probably just need to drink more water, but this will take the edge off" he finishes.

Instantly, relief washes over El, and she feels herself brighten. She happily finishes her meal, and although she hates taking the pills, she does so because she wants the rest of the day to be enjoyable.

And, just as Hopper had said, as she began to put on her jacket, she felt her headache begin to dissipate, she flashes a smile up at the man.

"Feeling better miss moody?" he jokes and El rolls her eyes, "Yes, can we go?" she asks jumping on the toes of her feet, feeling much more energized now.

Hopper only laughs as he holds open the door to the cabin, "Come on kid" he says as they both walk down the creaking cabin steps and make their way to the cruiser. El flying high, her joy uncontained, unable to wait and see her friends.

He was pretty sure he had misheard Hopper when he had actually agreed to letting El come over to his house for the movie marathon. And he was over the moon with a million different emotions knowing that his girlfriend was *finally* able to come back over to his house.

Even though she had been over for dinner, they didn't really get to spend any real time together. What he really wanted to do was bring her down to the basement and show her how he had made her fort bigger (*more fit for two people*) his innard voice teased him. And he had strung fairy lights from the "roof" of the fort, illuminating it in a soft glow.

He was secretly proud of his work as he continued to tidy up the very messy basement. He wanted to make sure the couch was clear of fallen food debris left by his friends, and the air to not smell like stale sweat socks. Because thanks to the boys growing bodies, they seemed to leave an odor every time they huddled together in the basement.

Of course, Max was usually the first one to comment, the rest of them not really noticing. But, he took the redheads word for it and placed a couple aromatic candles about, hoping to mask the smell.

He knew that this wasn't some 'date', especially since the other boys and Max would be there, but he remembered how much El had talked to him within the first couple months of her return about how much she wanted to see the basement. So, he wanted to make it special.

Mike moved their small t.v. so that it was turned just right so that El, 'And *hopefully him*', his mind taunted him, could see the movie from the blanket fort, while the others curled up on the couch.

Once he had everything set just so, he finally made his way up the stairs and into the kitchen, where a sweet aroma hit his nose.

"Hello Micheal, I'm just finishing making some cookies for you and your friends!" his mom chirps brightly, and he can't help but smile.

"Thanks mom, that's awesome!" his chipper mood couldn't be ruined, and his mom gave him a teasing stare as he began to hunt for the bags of popcorn to get them ready.

Thankfully, with his large growth spurt, he no longer needed to stand on his tip-toes to reach the treat he so desired. Now, he simply reached out his hand and grabbed three bags, making his way towards the microwave.

"Someone seems happy" his mom teases him as she places the finished cookies onto a cooling rack. Mike lets out a quick puff of air from his nose, "I'm just excited to see my friends...and El" he whispers the last part to himself, grinning brightly at the anticipation of seeing her soon.

"Well, I'm just glad Hopper finally let El come over, it's been weeks since the dinner and I haven't seen her since" she tuts as she loads another tray of unbaked cookies into the oven.

Mike turns away from the microwave as he allows the first bag to pop behind him as he leans against the counter. "He's *really* overprotective" he sighs.

His mom laughs as she cleans up around the kitchen, "I'd say so, he never had the chance to have a teenage daughter. Imagine adopting one with superpowers and one that already has a boyfriend", she throws Mike a knowing look and he flushes.

"Ugh, mom why do you have to be so embarrassing" he buries his head into his hands.

He hears his mom approach him as she takes his hands and pulled

them away from his face, their eyes fixate on each other, "I'm not embarrassing, I'm just happy to see you so happy" she gives him a slight smile.

"You were so depressed last year, your father and I barely knew what to do with you" she shrugs her shoulders as Mike listens.

"Little did we know your first love was taken from you" she says nonchalantly turning away from Mike, who is now gaping at her.

"What?" he says startled by her words, or more so *one* word in particular.

She gives him a sidelong glance, "You heard me Michael, you just have to figure it out on your own though" she singsongs.

He opens his mouth to speak but just as he does so the microwave pings behind him. Turning slowly he opens the door and pulls out the first steaming bag of popcorn, he places it delicately on the counter as he throws the next bag in.

But this time his eyes fixate on the hazy, swiveling bag in the microwave, "*Love?*" dances through his head, but he barely has time to truly think it through when the doorbell rings. His attention directly on the door as he moves through the kitchen at warp speed.

"I'll get it!" he calls last minute over his shoulder, and he mentally slaps himself, because he's pretty sure his mom knows what he's doing.

He stops quickly once he reaches the mudroom, and he takes a moment to catch his breath and straightens out his clothes, as he fusses with his hair.

Just then the doorbell rings again, he can hear muffled voices from outside, "El, I told you, you don't have to ring it twice". A heavy sigh, "I just wanted to" a female voice answers back

Mike can't help but smile at the slightly comical interaction that is happening right behind the door, and a rush of nervousness envelops him. So, with a deep breath, he tries to remain calm as he pulls the door open.

He's immediately greeted by two very surprised people who seemed to have been having a glaring match with one another. When they both turn towards him their expression changes, Hopper looks startled, all while El beams the second she notices it's him standing holding the door open.

"Mike!" she cheers and he only has a second to let go of the door to catch the girl as she barrels into his arms.

He stutters slightly as her warmth envelops him as he wraps his arms around her small frame. "Hey El, glad you could make it" he finally voices.

El pulls away only slightly, raising her head so that their eyes meet, and they flash each other a winning smile.

A loud throat clearing from behind them breaks them apart, and Mike startles, forgetting Hopper was even there.

"Oh, uh, hi chief" he manages to get out, and the older man rolls his eyes, "Hey" is all he says gruffly as El turns to stand in the house with him, her hand finds his like a magnet.

"Okay, bye dad!" El chirps to the man before trying to pull Mike off, but Hopper stops them, "Wait a minute!" and El freezes in her steps, causing Mike to stumble into her slightly. She gives the man a strained look, "What?" she almost whines.

Hopper gives her a firm look, and then his stare falls onto Mike, and he, is immediately uncomfortable. The man points a finger at El, "You remember your manners, and the rules" he starts and El nods her head unsympathetically, "Yeah, yeah, I know" she says once again pulling on Mike's arm.

But another force stops Mike in his tracks as Hopper grabs onto his free arm. He freezes, staring up at his girlfriends daughter, now he points a finger directly at him, "No funny business kid, and remember *no powers*" his voice quiets on the last words and Mike only nods.

"Good" he says and lets Mike go, "I'll be back around eight to get her, be ready" he directs the last part at El and she rolls her eyes, "Alright,

bye!" she says and turns once again, Mike sees Hopper shakes his head as he pulls their house door closed.

Mike is then forcefully pulled into his house and he can't help but laugh at his girlfriends eagerness. "Woah, El, hold on a second" he chuckles making the girl come to an abrupt halt, once again causing his tall self to stumble into her.

He falters and makes sure he doesn't knock the small girl down, so he steadies himself by placing both of his hands on her hips.

She smiles at the contact, and she quickly stands on her tiptoes to wrap her arms around his neck, pulling him into another hug.

"Missed you" she says softly as they stay in their embrace, and Mike can't help but melt into it. "I missed you too" he returns as they pull away slightly, arms still wrapped around one another.

They stay there, standing in the mudroom like there's nothing else in the world to do. Mike examines his girlfriends face, and smiles when he sees she's doing the same. Their dark eyes meet, and he can feel the swooping feeling in his stomach, his eyes flick to her mouth, and as if she can read his mind, he begins to feel her pull him down.

They inch closer together, it felt like an eternity as they came closer together. He can feel her breath tickled his face as he closes his eyes.

"Mike who was, oh-!" his mom walks in from the kitchen and both El and Mike jump apart as if they had just been struck by lightning, just before their lips would have touched.

"Oh...uh mom" he tries to pull himself together, he can feel his cheeks burning in embarrassment and with a quick glance to the side he can see El is bright red as well, and looks away sheepishly.

"El's...uh...she's...she's here" he trips over his words and mentally facepalms himself. He looks at his mom who, even though seems surprised, she gives him a coy look, before turning to El.

She moves towards the girl and opens her arms, El, once again startled by his moms quick affections freezes, but this time allows her arms to wrap around his moms back.

"El, it's good to see you" she singsongs, pulling away she give El a bright smile. "I was afraid that dad of yours was never going to let you come over here" she teases, taking a step back.

El seems at a loss for words, but she finally speaks, "Uh yeah, he's very overprotective" she shrugs her shoulders and his mom laughs, "That's what Mike just said! Aren't you two just the cutest" she sighs, and Mike's pretty sure he could have disappeared in this moment if he could.

"Mom!" he moans, but she phsaws him as she turns back towards the kitchen, "I'll leave you two alone, are you expecting the others soon?" she asks.

"Yes, soon" he groans taking a step towards El, who seems to be holding back a grin at his mother's embarrassing remarks.

"Okay then, let me know when to order the pizzas" she states before she begins to busy herself once again.

Mike lets out a sigh as he takes El's hands in his, she looks up at him, "Let's go downstairs, I want to show you something and I don't want my mom humiliating me more then she already has".

El giggles at this as she allows Mike to pull her along towards the basement door. And he leads her down the stairs hand in hand.

Her eyes widened in amazement as she takes in the basement she had first called home, although it seemed different, especially with it all picked up, the same feeling of warmth and safety still clung to the environment.

"Does it still feel the same?" Mike asks her as they descend the last step.

She gazes in wonder as she sees that Mike has definitely picked the place up, and it's not as musty smelling as it had been over a year ago.

El lets go of Mike's hand as she moves about the basement. Her eyes flicking from one poster to the next, and seeing that a lot of his toys

had been either organized or were no longer there.

But, then her eyes landed on the one thing she was hoping was still there: her fort. Slowly, she steps towards it, she stops in front of the blankets and carefully lifts the one in front, revealing the entrance.

She turns her head to see Mike has moved towards her as well, he stops beside her as she peeks in. "I uh...I hope you don't mind I made it bigger and oh-!" he starts as he moves to the other side of the fort as he fumbles around.

El begins to wonder what her boyfriend is doing but, as she looks into the fort, it suddenly erupts in light, and her eyes dazzle at the new feature.

"I thought you'd like it" he explains as he moves back to her, ruffling the back of his hair as he does so.

She doesn't say anything, because she begins to feel an overwhelming feeling arise within her.

Tears cascade down her face without her even knowing it as she stares at the wonder before her.

"El, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean-" Mike begins to worry as he believes he has upset her, but El moves quickly, enveloping the boy in her arms.

"It's perfect" is all she whispers into chest as she holds the boy she cares so much about tightly to her.

She hears him sigh in relief as he returns the hug. "Heh, that's a relief, I thought you didn't like it".

El shakes her head as she pulls away from him slightly, looking back at the fort, "Can we go in?" she asks, giving him a hopeful look.

She can see that it's not the *exact* same fort that she had stayed in, but instead it is much larger. And her heart swells thinking that Mike had made it big enough for the both of them.

Mike doesn't answer, and only nods, and the flush on his face tells

her that her guess is right.

So, bending down she crawls into the fort, and sits herself just right, her head just barely brushing the top blanket.

Mike is all limbs as he tries to fit himself into the fort as well. He knocks his knee into one of the chairs, and he winces, El tries not to giggle at the display.

His tallness does not allow him to sit like El, so instead his legs stick out from the fort as he lays on his side.

El gives him a warm smile and Mike only laughs, "I thought I got it big enough for both of us," he chuckles.

El giggles, "So, you *did* make it for both of us?" she teases, and Mike turns away, trying to not meet her gaze.

She can tell that he gets flustered quickly, so she bends down quickly placing a swift kiss on his cheek.

His eyes turn to meet hers quickly, allowing only a small space of air between them. She tries to portray everything she's feeling in that gaze, "I'm glad you did" she whispers.

She watches as her boyfriend finally begins to relax slightly, "Really?" he breathes.

And El only nods as she rearranges herself so that she is lying on her side as well. The space then evolves as they lay close together, their feet touching on the outside of the fort, their heads centimeters away from each other.

She can feel the electricity building, and how each of their breathings picks up.

Mike gives her a small smile, "I'm glad your home" his voice just as soft and meaningful as the last time he spoke them to her. She's pretty sure her heart melts right then and there as she ducks her head closer to his, "Me too" she responds with a quick smile, and with a fraction of space between them, she finally closes the distance, and their lips meet.

It's a different feeling when they kiss this time, and she's wondering if Mike can feel it too. She feels Mike's hand came to rest on her hip, as she moves to steady herself and places her hand on his chest. She squeezes the material between her fists, bunching it together.

She hums, something that she had never done before at how amazing it felt with hers and Mike's lips connected with one another.

This seems to elicit something new from Mike, because this time when he shifts to move their kiss, instead of bringing them together, he gently bites down on her lower lip. It doesn't hurt, but it surprises her slightly, and she gives a light 'oh!' in return, Mike pulls away frowning.

"I'm sorry El, I just-" he starts to explain, but El moves and places a hand over his mouth, silencing him, she shakes her head, "Stop apologizing" she jokes, "I...I just never-" she's at a loss for words as she shrugs her shoulders.

Mike ducks his head with a small huff of laughter, "It's a different kind of kiss, there's a lot of different ways...apparently" he raises one shoulder.

El finds herself intrigued, "What do you mean?" she asks. And Mike sputters slightly, "Uhm...well instead of just kissing...uh, some people like, use their tongues, and bite at each others lip...lightly" he adds as he begins to fluster.

She tilts her head, "Really?" Mike shrugs, "I mean...that's what I've heard, and uh...seen in movies, I haven't done anything like that I mean you-" and he stops, as El gives him a peculiar look.

He lets out a warbly breath, "You...were my first kiss" he states, and El feels her body soften.

This was something she had never thought of. Mike had a life before she stepped into it, there could have been other girls, it never crossed her mind.

She had asked Hopper once while during one of her soap operas why one particular guy seemed to kiss every girl that came his way.

Hopper had scoffed and explained to her that if you truly loved or cared about someone, they were the only person that you kissed and that you were faithful to them.

It was something she had taken to heart. Because, back a year ago after Mike had kissed her, she had always hoped and dreamed of the day they could do it again. She could never see herself doing that with another person. And she never once thought of him kissing other girls, but, he had the opportunity to do so.

But, he didn't. And she remembers the long heartfelt talks he would have into the supercom, silently waiting for her to answer back, but she never did.

It broke her heart. Remembering how long he waited. And just as Hopper had said about people being faithful, that was Mike to a 't'.

She could begin to feel herself getting emotional again, and Mike caught this, "Hey, are you okay I didn't mean to make you upset", he lightly reached out his hand and stroked away a stray tear.

Honestly, she had no idea why she was being so emotional about everything, but for some reason this particular statement truly moved her.

"Mike" she whispers, making sure his dark eyes found hers, "Yeah" he looks up at her with deep eyes.

"I...I never got to say thank you...for waiting for me. Even though you never knew if I was okay" she sniffed.

Mike softens, "El, I would have waited *everyday* for you if I knew there was a reason. I knew you weren't gone and I wasn't ready to give up. Not for you" his voice is delicate.

She can't help the tears that continue to fall and that's when she leans in quickly again, grappling her lips to his, and she pulls him close.

It's something neither of them have ever experienced, the way their lips molded and moved together. The way they poured all their unspoken emotions into that one kiss. And it's something that thrilled El to her core.

She wants to experiment, just like Mike did. But they're so heavily involved with each other that they don't hear the footsteps that trample down the stairs, the only thing that breaks them apart is a sudden voice.

"Where are they, Karen said, OH MY GOD!"

And that's when Mike and El break apart in a quick frenzy for the second time that day. They try to shuffle away from one another, but there's nowhere to go in the fort.

"Were you guys just sucking face!" Dustin's voice is louder than need be in El's opinion, as she and Mike finally break away from the fort. They both fix their clothes and hair and desperately try to not make eye contact with Dustin, Lucas, Will or Max, who now stand with knowing looks on their faces.

"Ha! They totally were, look at their faces!" Lucas points directly at them, all while getting closer to Mike, inspecting his face, "Dude, when did you start wearing lip gloss!" he then doubles over, as does Dustin.

"Shut up you guys!" Mike growls at them as he eventually looks over to El and gives her a sheepish smile, which she returns.

And, even though she *knows*, she's not supposed to use her powers, she figures this is an okay time. So with a quick flick of her chin, both boys freeze in their spots, while a small trickle of blood leaves her nose.

Now, Will, Max and Mike are bent over laughing at the ridiculousness of the two frozen boys.

Even though they can't move, their eyes widen, scared. El approaches them, "Don't forget what I did to that mouth breather at school, I could do it to you guys too" she taunts.

"Yes, do it, do it!" Max cheers her on. And through their frozen mouths both Dustin and Lucas cry, "No!" although it is quite muffled.

El quirks another eyebrow up at the boys and she can hear them beginning to whimper, and that's all she needs for satisfaction as she

lets them go.

They both collapse, their limbs now being free. Mike comes over and wraps an arm around her and gives her a quick peck on the side of her face, "It's pretty cool having a girlfriend with superpowers" he smirks at Dustin and Lucas who shake their heads.

"Awe, come on El, that would have been hilarious to see them wet themselves!" Max gives the girl a slight shove, which makes El chuckle.

"Next time for sure" she reassures the redhead, and they give each other a high five.

"You guys haven't learned to keep your mouths shut" Will shakes his head at the other two.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever, we just don't need to see you guys swapping saliva every time you're together" Dustin grumbles as he dumps his backpack, which is filled with various candies, onto the coffee table.

"It's not like you guys were here, you just-" but Mike falters with his next words, his cheeks flaming.

"Interrupted your make-out session" Max finishes as she laughs grabbing a bag of licorice and plops onto the couch.

El watches Mike throw her a glare, but she takes his hand in hers, he looks down at her, "Let's start the movies, I want to watch them all before Hopper comes to pick me" she flutters her eyes at him, and she sees him melt.

"Okay" he quickly agrees.

And he and Will disappear upstairs, Will having offered to help him get the bowls of popcorn and cookies Mike's mom made.

El decides to sit down beside Max, as she rifles through the large candy pile, while Lucas and Dustin argue how to set up the VHS player.

Max turns to her and whispers, "Geez, you and Mike seem to be

getting pretty comfortable around each other".

El startles and gives the girl a wide eye look, and the redhead smiles at her mischievously. "What?" El mumbles and Max gives a little laugh, "I just mean, I've never seen you guys go at it like that before."

"Go..at it?" El tests the words and Max laughs again, "Oh, I forget sometimes you don't know slang, I just mean, like...you guys were getting intimate is all" she shrugs her shoulders as she finally decides on a twix bar, as she unwraps the treat.

"Intimate" she parrots the word back to Max, who seems somewhat unsure about how to answer this next question.

"Uhm-" she starts, but just then Mike and Will trump back down the stairs, each with a handful of bowls filled to the brim with popcorn. While Mike attempts to balance a plate of cookies on top of his popcorn bowl.

"Alright, here are the snacks, my mom has the pizza ordered, so let's start watching the movie!" Mike's excited voice pulls El away from hers and Max's conversation, and she decides to leave it there, she'll ask her later.

Right now, she just wants to enjoy this time with her friends, and maybe getting to snuggle up to her boyfriend isn't such a bad thought either.

The afternoon drags on as they begin the first Star Wars movie.

El had only watched this one with Mike about a month ago and had never been able to watch the other two.

Dustin, Max and Lucas sat on the couch together, while Will had opted for the floor, using the couch as a back rest. This of course found El and Mike back in their fort. However, this time less *intimately* as Max had described their earlier encounter.

Now, they both laid on their stomachs, eyes entranced into the movie, as their hands closest to the other were being held.

The pizza had arrived about a half hour ago, just as the movie was about to finish. And as El laid there, she began to realize a small ache in her stomach.

She thought that maybe lying on her stomach while eating probably wasn't the best idea. So, she rearranged herself, sitting cross legged on the floor. Still intertwining her hands with Mike's. The pain drifted away, and she went back to focusing on the movie.

El believed that her problems were solved, especially since they were all now enjoying the second movie together. But, another sharp pain struck her.

"Hey, you okay?" Mike questioned El, also sitting up beside her. She gives him a questioning look and he looked down at their hands, and to her surprise she can see she's holding onto his quite tightly.

"Oh! Sorry" she says loosening her grip on his hand and turning back towards the movie, hoping the pain would stop.

However, she noticed that in-consistently she would have uncomfortable pains ripple through her abdomen, and she tried to believe that it was a stomach ache from all the candy and pizza they had eaten.

But, there was something different about the pains. They stayed longer and made her stomach tight. She finally decided that going to the bathroom was her best bet.

So, she goes to move and Mike catches her movements, "Bathroom" she whispers to him, and he nods his head.

Approaching the bathroom, she tries to not grab the attention of her friends. And they seem so invested with the movie, that she doesn't see one person turn to look at her.

After she has the door shut to the bathroom, she stands in front of the mirror, examining her face. It's not pale, nor is her nose bleeding. And then another pain and she squeezes her stomach tight, she groans silently.

When the pain passes, she pulls her shirt up and examines her

stomach, even though it seems more bloated than usual, she can't see any visible marks of something externally that would hurt her.

She finally decides to use the bathroom, however, when she looks down, she sees a very familiar color that is smeared against her underwear, and her heart quickly jumps to her throat.

She's *never* had this happen before and she silently begins to freak out, not sure what to do.

"Were the pains causing her to bleed internally?" her mind raced with a million thoughts as to what was going on with her.

The panic filled her, as she began to hyperventilate.

She cupped her head in her hands and tried breathing like Hopper had taught her, but she was pretty sure her heart was going to jump out of her chest.

Finally, a knock on the door brought her somewhat back to reality.

"El?" Mike's voice is muffled by the thick wooden door.

"You've been in there for awhile, you okay?" his voice is full of worry.

She shakes her head to herself, trying to hold back her tears.

"El!?" he asks again a bit more tensely as he begins to try at the doorknob, but its locked.

Finally she cries out, "Blood!"

The doorknob stops jiggling, "El, did you just say blood, is your nose okay, what's going on?" but she can't bring herself to do anything, her mind is going a million miles a minute.

She can hear the boys panicking and arguing on the other side. When, another knock is heard, "El, it's Max, let me in, please" her voice is firm and demanding.

She listens as she and Mike have a quarreling match outside the door. But, she can't make out the words, then...it goes silent.

And now El begins to worry about what's going on out there.

"El", Mike's voice again, "Let Max in, trust me, you'll be okay" his voice seems kind of nervous. But, Mike never usually lets anyone else help her through moments unless it's important.

So, finally pulling herself together, she cleans herself up the best she can and approaches the door. She unlocks it and opens it slowly.

She becomes face to face with Max, who's giving her a sympathetic look, "Hey, can we talk?"

And so, El lets her in, Max shutting and locking the door behind her, turning towards El she gives her a half smile.

"Did this happen when you went to the bathroom?" is her first question, and El nods.

"Does your stomach hurt?" is her second, El nods again.

And with a quick sigh, Max holds up a square item with a florally pattern El didn't even realize she was holding, "El, I think you just got your first period".

He was truly flying high when he had seen El first set her eyes on the basement once again. The excitement that filled her gaze was more than enough for Mike to realize he had done everything perfectly.

Then, when he showed her the expanded fort, and she began to joke with him about it being big enough for both of them, he realized just how much both of them had changed. And it sent a small thrill up his spine at her coyness, almost suggestive.

His stupid teenage boy brain reacted to this a little too much, and he tried to settle himself down. Instead, trying to focus on how beautiful his girlfriend looked under the twinkling lights above her.

He was a little annoyed at the fact he hadn't made the fort big enough for himself. So, trying to fit under the blankets comfortably was a challenge.

But, it was all worth it for the giggle that El gave him, and the quick peck on the cheek. However, what was even more rewarding was when El moved in to kiss him, and he lost all his senses.

Even though they had kissed many times before, there was a different charge with this particular kiss. There was a bit more passion that burned when their lips met this time. And as they delved deeper into each other he could feel himself melting into the embrace.

But, then El let out a soft moan as their lips parted with one another as her hand coiled into his shirt, so of course his stupid hormones seemed to take over, and that's when he decided to bite onto her lower lip gently, which elicited a small 'oh!' from the girl he was currently kissing.

'*Stupid, stupid, stupid!*' went through his mind as he watched his girlfriend gave him a questioning look, as she began to ask about what he had just done.

"I'm sorry El, I just-" he starts to explain, but El moves and places a hand over his mouth, silencing him, she shakes her head, "Stop apologizing" she jokes, "I...I just never-" she shrugs her shoulders, and he knows what she's trying to get at.

Mike ducks his head with a small huff of laughter, "It's a different kind of kiss, there's a lot of different ways...apparently" he then goes off into a long, uncomfortable rant about different types of kissing.

He then goes even further, stopping himself short just as he explains to her that she was his first kiss.

The statement seemed to surprise the girl beside her, as she seems to process this information within her head.

He was trying to be as truthful as possible with everything in their relationship. When he had kissed her in the cafeteria, it never crossed his mind that she might not even know what he was doing.

Then, they were separated for a year, he had no idea if she was dead or alive, but he didn't care. The torch that began to burn for her was in full throttle and no matter how awful the feeling of being away

from her was, it still flickered.

But, then they were miraculously reunited, only to be torn apart once again. He had held onto her arms desperately, silently wishing that she wouldn't leave, that she wouldn't leave *him* again.

And after they promised to reunite shortly, he watched as her eyes flicked to his lips and she stood on her tiptoes as she came closer to him. '*Holy shit!*' went through his mind as he realized she was about to kiss him, and he knew right then and there that what he felt for her, she felt exactly the same.

Of course, that kiss never happened, but the snowball made up for that. And the many that followed after.

He was brought out of his thoughts when he noticed El's face began to fall slightly, as her eyes glistened with tears. '*How did I mess it up this time?*' he sighs to himself.

He reaches out an arm, "Hey, are you okay I didn't mean to make you upset" he wipes away at her stray tears that descend from her eye. Slightly afraid of her next words.

But, they stun him. "I...I never got to say thank you...for waiting for me. Even though you never knew if I was okay" she sniffed.

He couldn't believe her words "El, I would have waited *everyday* for you if I knew there was a reason. I knew you weren't gone and I wasn't ready to give up. Not for you" his voice is delicate.

Tears continue to trail down her face, and he instantly becomes worried, however, he's startled once again as El leans in quickly once again, grasping onto his shirt and interlocking their lips together once again.

He can't explain the feeling or emotions that trail through him as they mold their lips together again and again in a frantic motion.

El begins to shift, and he follows her movements and soon they're laying down, El just resting on his chest. He feels the smallest movement of El's tongue begin to sneak out of her mouth and just as soon as he feels it, it's gone, thanks to the loud obnoxious voice of his

friend, and he and El spring apart as if caught on fire.

His stupid teenage hormones cause him to shuffle awkwardly as he tries to control his thoughts or where he and El might have gone to if it weren't for the interruption.

There friends then tease them ferociously at being caught making out with each other.

He knows his face is burning hot as he and El finally stand from the fort and listen to their friends. But, El puts a stop to it pretty quickly, and Mike realizes just how amazing his girlfriend is.

Will offers to help him upstairs to grab the popcorn and cookies. Mike still can't help but feel embarrassed being caught making out with his girlfriend by his friends.

Even though he tries to hide it, Will picks up on it immediately.

"Hey", his oldest friend grabs his attention. Mike turns to look at the boy who is grabbing one of the bowls of popcorn.

"You know, it's okay that you guys do that stuff" Will shrugs his shoulders, not making eye contact with Mike, who shuffles awkwardly in his place.

"It's been a long time since we've all see you happy, and I mean...that's part of having a girlfriend right?" he keeps his voice light and teasing, Mike finally makes eye contact with him and smiles.

"Yeah, thanks Will, it's nice having one friend who doesn't tease you" he finally relaxes as he grabs a plate of cookies and sets them on top of one of the popcorn bowls.

Will laughs, "Oh, I didn't say I *wasn't* going to tease you".

And Mike gives him a stunned look, as Will shakes his head and moves towards the basement door, "I was just saying that it's okay to do that stuff, but if you get caught, be prepared".

Mike huffs, but can't help but smile as he follows Will down the steps.

As they make their way downstairs, he can see that Max and El are talking quietly, and a look of interest and uncertainty cross El's face.

He becomes curious as to what they were talking about, but with a victorious cheer from Dustin after having set up the VHS player and t.v, it goes to the back of his mind.

They all then begin to settle in various spots around the basement. El quickly stood and made her way over to the fort. Mike hesitates slightly, not wanting to hear the ridicules from his friends, but when he glances over to his girlfriend, she gives him a hopeful look, and he decides to say '*Screw it*' about his friends teasing as he settles in beside El, both smiling at one another.

The beginning of the first movie goes along fine. After about an hour his mom brings down the pizza and they all eagerly dig in.

Mike eventually found himself and El laying on their stomachs, bellies full from the pizza and candy, content as they hold hands.

At one point, out of the corner of his eye, he can tell something is wrong with El, as she shifts uncomfortably and a stain of pain crosses her face.

He goes to comment, but she moves to sit up and it seems that the movement settles her.

It's when the second movie starts, that her fidgeting increases and at one point she's squeezing his hand in a death grip.

When he comments on it, he notices that she honestly had no idea what she was doing and relaxes her grip. He shifts so that he was sitting just like her, their hands still latched together.

But, it isn't long until El moves once again and this time Mike gives her a questioning look. And she whispers, "Bathroom" to him, does he begin to think that maybe she's got a stomach ache or something.

He watches her go and tries to return to the movie, but his thoughts don't move away from his girlfriend. About five minutes tick by, and then another. It's then his anxiety skyrockets and he pushes himself to his feet, making his way to the bathroom door.

He knocks silently, trying to not bring attention to himself or El.

"El?" he calls softly, as he presses his ear against the door, listening for any response, but none comes.

"You've been in there for awhile, you okay?" his voice is full of worry.

Still no response, and he goes into fear mode.

He then finds himself calling out her name once again as he begins to jiggle the outside door knob but the lock holds true. He then hears her call out "Blood!" and he freezes.

His friends have finally picked up on the commotion going on by the bathroom, as they run to his side asking, "What's going on?" each one worried.

He ignores them, as he calls out again, "El, did you just say blood, is your nose okay, what's going on?"

But nothing comes from the door and he panics.

"What about blood, is she okay?" Dustin pipes in.

"I don't know, she's been acting kind of weird as we've been watching the movies, she's been in there awhile I don't-" he stops short, not really sure what he should be thinking or believing.

But, then Max moves them all apart roughly, shoving them aside, she raps on the door, "El, it's Max, let me in, please" her voice is firm and demanding.

Mike is slightly annoyed as he grabs onto the redheads shoulders turning her towards him, "What the hell, what makes you think you can help her any better than me!?"

He doesn't mean to sound like a jerk, but his heart is racing in his chest and he doesn't know what's going on with his girlfriend.

Max glares at him as she raises an eyebrow in question to him, "Seriously?" she spits at him.

"Obviously if you don't know what's going on, then, no. You shouldn't be helping her" she says defensively and Mike growls.

"How do *you* know what's going on with her!?" he shouts back and he can see Max has reached her limit.

"I'm a *girl*. I know *exactly* what's going on" she tries to reason with him, almost hinting at something, but Mike stands there, continuously dumbfounded.

Max turns and looks at all the boys around her, they all raise their shoulders in uncertainty, not sure as well.

She finally lets out a long breath, shaking her head, "Seriously, oh my gosh you guys, El's got her first period, idiots!" she waves her arms about as if it's the most obvious thing in the world.

Mike's eyes widen in realization, and...he really wants to smack himself in the head for being such a *mouthbreather*.

"Oh" is all he's able to formulate and the other boys freeze as well, not sure where they belong in this conversation.

Max sighs, "Look, let me handle this, I'll get her calmed down because I'm sure she's freaking out, and then we'll probably go to your mom or something just...don't make her feel weird" she finishes.

Mike only nods, not really sure what he should do, but then Max gestures towards the door, and he gets the hint.

So, with a deep breath, he approaches the door and knocks one last time, "El", he starts, "Let Max in, trust me, you'll be okay".

He hopes this is enough for the scared girl to accept, and thankfully a moment later, he hears the door unlatch, and Max slips in.

He turns back towards the guys who are now all sitting on the couch, either twiddling their thumbs or trying to not look awkward, which they are failing to do.

Mike moves to sit down beside them, they sit in a pregnant silence.

But, of course Dustin ruins it, "Well, I guess that's what happens when girls join the party" he sighs, while everyone else lets out groans of disapproval.

Period.

She had heard the word before. When Hopper was teaching her about the importance of writing, he had explained to her that a period was something used to end a sentence. She had been practicing for almost a year to improve her writing skills and Hopper was always impressed by how she had improved.

But now, she wasn't so sure about what Max was referring to.

The fiery girl was just staring at her, waiting for her to respond, but El honestly didn't know what to say.

Even though the girls had grown closer, El was still hesitant towards the only other female party member.

And now, it seemed as if she was the only one who could help her.

Max finally lets out a long breath, rolling her eyes, "I'm assuming Hopper hasn't even prepared you for this?" she asks.

El shakes her head, looking down. She feels somewhat ashamed.

Max seems to pick up on this, because she approaches her slowly and places a gentle hand on her shoulder.

El raises her amber eyes to meet Max's soft blue ones, and she can see the empathy sitting there.

"Look, I'm not trying to be mean, I'm *really* trying to help" Max explains as she once again holds up the peculiar item in her hand.

"What..is period?" El finally asks, reverting back to her more stagnant way of speaking.

Max pulls a half smile, "It's this sucky event that happens to us poor girls once a month. We bleed from our vaginas, have stupid cramps

and just feel sucky. Welcome to the wonders of being a girl" she said sarcastically and El gives her a look.

"Why?" is El's next inclination.

Max sighs, "Because, it's our bodies way of telling us that we can have babies. I started mine a couple months ago. It sucks."

"Babies?" El honestly had no idea what Max was talking about. She had seen a woman pregnant on t.v shows here and there and had pointed it out to Hopper. He of course told her that the woman was carrying a baby, but everytime she asked how it got there, he would inadvertently change the subject.

El sees Max's face flush, and she immediately deduces that the topic of babies seems to be one where everyone isn't sure how to talk about it.

But, Max shakes her head, "Look, I know you probably have a million questions" she starts and El frowns at this, feeling as if she doesn't understand anything *again*. Max, however, quickly grabs onto her shoulder, making her look into her eyes.

"El" she says softly, "*No one*, knows about this stuff until someone talks to them about it, I know I didn't" she allows a gentle smile to fall onto her face.

El's eyes widen at this, "Really?" she asks, trying to not sound too excited about this notion, but Max giggles, "Yes, really. But, I also think you talking to Mike's mom would be helpful, I know my mom was for me" she shrugs her shoulders.

El nods at this, "Can Mike come?" is her next question and Max bursts out laughing, quickly shaking her head, causing her red hair to fly about. "Ah, sorry El, but that's a good one" she wipes away a tear that is at the corner of her eye.

"Look, boys and girls go through different things when we hit puberty, and boys tend to get a little weirded out by what happens to us" Max explains.

"Puberty, why 'weirded out'?" El questions, and Max lets out a long

breath, "Again, I think Karen will explain all of this better, but first-" she then motions to the little package she brought into the bathroom with her.

She holds it up to El, and she gives it a questioning look. "You see, when a girl gets her period, she bleeds for anywhere from four to six days. Sometimes longer" Max rolls her eyes, while El's widen.

"Why that long!?" she all but yells and Max huffs, "Because life is cruel and decided to let women go through this lovely journey".

El sighs, taking the package from Max, "What do I do?"

Max takes the package back from El's hand and opens it, showing El how it works, "It's called a pad, see, when you peel off this part, it's sticky, you uh...place it in your underwear" she says slightly embarrassed.

"You bleed quite a bit during your period, this makes it so it doesn't get messy".

El nods at this explanation taking the pad gently from Max.

"Alright, I'll uh...I'll let you get that- uh...yeah, and I'll wait for you outside, okay?" Max gives her a look and El only nods, she figures she understands what to do.

So, Max gives her one last smile before exiting the bathroom, leaving El alone once again.

She lets out a long breath, before she begins to unfasten her pants once again.

She *really* doesn't enjoy the feeling the pad has between her legs, it feels like it shouldn't be there, and she self consciously checks herself in the mirror to see if it can be seen through her jeans. Thankfully, it can't, but the awkwardness of the foreign object is not something she's sure she'll get used to.

So, sucking in a deep breath, El finally exits the bathroom, Max is standing right by the doorway and she gives her a slight nod, which

El returns.

But, El looks up and can see now that all the boys eyes are on her, they seem uncertain. And El remembers what Max had just told her, '*Guys are weird about this stuff*'. So, she can only assume that they are taking this all in, without being weird, however, they fail miserably.

Mike, however, stands and approaches her slowly, he gives her a soft look, "Hey" she can hear the nervousness in his voice, "Uhm...are you okay?" he doesn't sound sure about his own question.

El ducks her head, but nods, and she can hear Mike let out a sigh of relief. "Okay, I'm glad" he pauses and she turns to look at him, and he seems very nervous, like if he says the wrong thing, she'll explode or something.

"Uh, why don't we go back to the mov-" he starts but that's when Max steps in, "We'll have to cut movie day short, El needs to talk to your mom" her blue eyes glare into Mike, which he returns.

Dustin speaks up from the couch, "But why? We've had this plan-" but Max quickly cuts him off too, "Look, losers, El needs some education because apparently Hopper is too shy to talk about these necessary things. And honestly, that's not fair to El" she then moves to grab El's wrist, which surprises the brown haired girl.

She then gives a teasing look to Mike, "Besides, I think *you*-" and at this she pokes Mike square into his chest, "Would *want* her to have some idea about the birds and the bees especially with how comfortable you two were under the fort" she sing songs, and at this the other boys in the basement begin to howl in laughter.

Even though El isn't entirely sure what Max is insinuating, she feels her own face get hot, and Mike's cheeks erupts into a *very* dark shade of red.

"Whatever, just, take her to my mom" he tries to hide his face, and El's face falls seeing not just annoyance, but there's lingering anger there as well and it startles her.

She wants to say something to the boy, but Max pulls at her wrist

"Come on El" and drags her up the stairs. Leaving El feeling not so good about what just happened.

Max's words sting him slightly, he was becoming quite annoyed as to how his friends were continuously jeering and picking fun at his and El's relationship.

So, when she begins to insinuate *other* aspects that might come with their relationship, he can't help but feel angered.

He doesn't fully understand what El is going through, but he knows enough growing up with an older sister. And all he wants to do is comfort her, and just be there. Because he can only imagine what she might be feeling in this moment.

But, right now all he can do is watch the only other female party member drag her upstairs. While he's left there feeling annoyed and ticked off.

The basement is silent after the last exchange, none of the other boys daring to speak. But, of course, Dustin, who struggles with silence, finally breaks it, "Uh, well, we could always finish the movies" he states lamely.

Mike turns to look at his other friends who seem at a loss for words. Guys of course, not being the greatest at knowing how to comfort one another.

Out of the corner of Mike's eye though, he sees Will move and slowly approach him, when he reaches him, Will places a warm hand on Mike's shoulder. Will tries to give him an encouraging smile, "Don't worry Mike. Max is right, she kind of needs this knowledge and I'm sure when they're done, they'll come back down".

Mike tightens his lips together, still not speaking. Lucas pipes in, "We've got to remember, El doesn't know any of *that stuff*" he laments, "I mean...we have weird stuff happen to us too, but we've had health class, we understand it better" he tries to reason.

Mike finally lifts his head to look at the sympathetic looks they are

all giving him, and he can tell that they are actually being genuine and not just assholes.

He finally sighs and allows a small smile to trickle onto his face, "Okay, let's finish the movie" he states as he makes his way to the couch, and the other boys give out small cheers.

They all settle back into the movie. However, Mike struggles to focus, wondering what *exactly* his mom will talk to El about. And, being her constant reassurance he's sure he will be receiving a lot more questions from his girlfriend and his face flushes lightly at the thought.

El stumbles up the stairs behind Max, unsure about what's going to happen next.

But, Mike had told her to trust Max, and she had already helped her with the first problem, so she knew she had to trust the redhead to make the right decision.

As they opened the basement door, they walked slowly into the kitchen where both Karen and Nancy were chatting idly.

Their presence must have been heard, because just as they walk in, both burnette's turn to look at the girls.

They both smile, "Hey girls, coming up to take a break from the boys?" Karen teases as she moves about the kitchen taking care of dried dishes.

Nancy laughs at this, folding her arms over her chest, "Probably just sick of the nerdfest".

Karen scoffs, "Nancy" she warns and the girl just shrugs her shoulders looking back to both El and Max, her face then turns worrisome.

"Everything okay?" Nancy asks the girls and Max pulls El further into the kitchen. Now, Karen's attention is fully on them, "Girls?" she asks them with a concerned look.

Max sighs, "Uhm, I think El needs to have a talk with you" she

gestures towards Karen and the woman places her hand on her chest, "Me, why?" she asks.

Max turns to look at El and nods, so the telekinetic girl takes a deep breath and looks down at the floor as she speaks, "I..I got my..my period" she says and both the Wheeler woman gasped, causing El to look up in alarm.

Karen goes straight into mother mode, "Oh, sweetie is this your first one?" she questions and El nods slowly.

"Has Hopper talked to you about this?" Nancy asks, and El shakes her head.

Karen sighs softly, "Well then, you've got two woman here who can help explain it all". El looks up and meets Karen's eyes, they are soft and understanding, and El's own eyes widened, realizing they are the dark shade that Mike has, she knows that she is safe immediately and her worries drift away.

Mike's mom takes a step back and looks at her daughter, "Nancy, would you mind calling Joyce? I'm sure she will be a huge help as well, and she's at Melvald's today, can you ask her to bring supplies?" she then stops before speaking once again, "Oh, and grab that book I got you when you were El's age, that'll really help too!" she chirps.

Nancy smiles at this, "Yes of course" and she is off to the telephone, while El and Max stand in the kitchen with Karen.

The older woman gives the girls a winning smile as she removes her apron, and sets it in a ball on the counter. "Alright then, let's move this conversation to the living room" and she leads the girls to the large living area, where just a few weeks ago El had one of the most stressful evenings of her life.

Karen gestures for them to sit, and Max and El both do. Mike's mother places her hands in her lap, "So, I guess we should start at the beginning".

And then El finds herself immersed in a long winded explanation about the human body.

"And that's how babies get made" Karen finishes as she moves to take a sip from her wine glass that she had opened about an hour ago.

Joyce, who arrived very shortly after Nancy had called her, a Melvald's shopping bag clutched in her hand, sat on El's other side, Max having moved to sit on the floor next to Nancy. Each older, more experienced woman adding to the explanation as they went on.

El's trying to process all the information that has just been handed to her, and she feels slightly overwhelmed.

"I know it's a lot sweetie, but that's why Nancy's book will really help, especially if you've got more questions and we aren't around to help" Karen reassures El, who only nods.

She had *no* idea about everything that was just told to her. She knew that couples kissed and such, but she had never heard about sex, puberty and how boys were different than girls. But, it made her feel much more aware about certain things the boys did.

Joyce speaks from beside her, "Do you have any questions?" El turns towards her and only gives her a heavy sigh and a half smile, "A lot" she jokes and the girls around her laugh.

"It's definitely a lot, but it gets easier to understand" Nancy adds.

"And, if you have any questions, either of you girls" Karen looks between El and Max, "You can always ask us, that's what we're here for" she gives them each a warm smile.

There is one question on El's mind, and she's a little hesitant to ask, but it seems her mouth moves quicker than her brain, "So-" she starts, but falls short.

She flicks her eyes to her lap, where she has just about worried a hole through her sweater that she has been playing with almost the entire time.

Karen must sense her hesitation, because she reaches forward and places her hand on El's moving ones, stopping their movements. Their eyes meet, "El, there are no silly questions, we want you to feel comfortable".

And El knows this, but now that she understands more, she feels like her question might be embarrassing, but she's curious.

So, with a deep breath she speaks softly, "So...Mike...Mike and I... we can...we can have...sex?" she winces slightly as her words come out and a hush falls across the room, and El doesn't dare to look up.

After a beat, El feels like she's asked the worst possible question and she just wants the couch to swallow her whole. But, then she feels another hand on top of hers, and she peeks up to look at Joyce.

She tilts her head and smiles at her, giving a soft sigh before she speaks, "Remember what we talked about how sex is for when you're a little bit older" she tries to explain, and El nods at this, "Yes but...when? How older?" she questions now looking between all the girls in the room.

This time Nancy speaks up, "That's honestly up to you guys" she shrugs and El's pretty sure she sees her mother gives her a sharp look.

Nancy rolls her eyes at the look, "I'm trying to be honest I mean, look at El and Mike, we *all* know that they're going to get married one day" she states and this causes El to flush as a bright smile grows across her face.

"So, it'd be stupid to not say when *they're* both ready" she says, giving El a gentle look.

"I mean Nancy is right, El" and the young girl turns to look at Joyce. "It's just, as we explained the longer you're in a relationship, the more things begin to change, the more things you begin to do" she trails off.

"But, you have to be careful, it's not like you guys couldn't have sex, but if you're not prepared, we told you what it could lead to" Karen reminds her, and El's eyes widen, she shakes her head, "No babies, not yet".

And the girls laugh again. Joyce pats El's back, "Just, when you're ready, you've got to get protection for *both* of you," she stresses.

"And that's why we're here, so we can help you when that time

comes" Nancy adds in.

"Just" Karen starts, and El turns towards the woman, "I know you and Mike are close, but you *should* wait until you are at least sixteen or seventeen, so that your hormones aren't the only thing talking" she says delicately, trying to convey exactly what she is trying to have El understand. And she does.

El moves her head and makes eye contact with each of the females in the room and gives them a bright smile, "No, I want to wait, but...thank you, all of you for your help. I feel less...alone" she finishes.

Karen and Joyce then move to wrap the girl in a hug, while Nancy and Max stand to join in as well, and El swells at feeling.

They stay like that for a bit, and as they eventually pulled away, El finds herself with a grin on her face, but tears streaming down her face, and she laughs as she wipes away at them, "Darn hormones" she chuckles and the others join in.

Hopper's POV

He's exhausted by the end of the *very* long day he had while house hunting.

He had spent the entire day looking over several homes that were within his price range. There were quite a few that were not what he was looking for when it came to cleanliness to say the least. And two were even further out of town, which was not what he wanted.

However, the second to last house he had come to stumble upon peaked his interest. It was tucked out back of a local culdesac, that was only a mile from town, and half a mile from the boy's neighborhood.

Not only was it at his price range, but it was the perfect size for what he had wanted. There were three bedrooms and two and a half bathrooms, exactly what he wanted with having a growing teenage daughter.

It was a simple two story home, a quaint living room, kitchen and master bedroom downstairs while there were two smaller bedrooms upstairs, with an adjoining bathroom to both.

The semi-older home had been listed by an elderly, widowed woman who was looking to move in with her family. So, the decorations and wallpaper were much more on the floral, frilly side. But, with a new coat of paint and some elbow grease, he knew the home would be perfect.

After he had finished looking at the last home, which was much too big for himself and his daughter, he called the lister and put in his offer. So, he was hoping to hear back soon from the real estate office to hear some news.

Now, however, his blazer's neon clock blinked 7:58, as he made his way to the Wheeler's residence.

He was more excited than he thought he would be to share with El the good news and he hoped she had, had a good day with the boys and Max.

He could imagine her excited glee knowing that once she learned how to ride a bike, she would be able to visit her friends and they would be able to come to her much more easily.

However, he knew some ground rules would need to be put into place, *'Especially with Wheeler'*, his mind reminded him.

He let out a long sigh as he pulls up to the Wheeler's pristine white home, *'Going to have to have that talk with her soon'*, another voice reminded him. But, he shook the thoughts away, knowing he would probably have Joyce or someone help fill her in on what will happen as she gets older and the whole thing about the birds and the bees.

Hopper can't help but chuckle at his silly thoughts, shaking his head as he approaches the green door to the Wheeler's home, knocking on it with a firm closed fist. *'She hasn't even gotten her period yet'*, he reminds himself.

But, he doesn't realize the surprise news he is about to receive,

especially when Karen opens the door and gives him a startled look.

"Oh, hello Hopper, here to pick up El?" she questions as she motions for him to come in.

Hopper nods, "Yep, time to get her home. Did she have a good day?" he asks as he follows Karen into the living room, where, to his surprise El sits tucked up on the couch, Joyce sitting beside her, while the red head and the eldest Wheeler child, sit on the floor. All eyes are now on him.

This seems peculiar to him. The kids were supposed to be watching movies together, but there seemed to be the lack of boys.

His eyes flicked over to El, who gives him a shy look, "Hi dad" she whispers, still holding her knees against her chest.

He moves to Joyce, and raises an eyebrow at her, "What are you doing here?" he doesn't mean to sound rude, but the whole 'girl meeting' has the worry within him rise.

Joyce opens her mouth to speak, but Hopper doesn't let her, "Why are you girls up here?" he gestures to El and Max, who seemed startled by his question, as his mind goes down a deep dark path or 'what ifs'

And soon, all the questions poured from his mouth, "Is everything okay?", "Did something happen?", "Did the boys do-", "Did that kid hurt you!?" his voice rises with each acquisition, and every woman in the room stares wild eyed at him.

Joyce moves quickly to stand and approach him, she places a gentle hand on his shoulder, he's breathing heavily, unsure why.

"Hopper" she says calmly and he looks at her, "Nothing's wrong" she begins to explain, and at this Hopper drops his shoulders, "Nothing?" he questions and at this Joyce lets out a soft chuckle, "No, but-" she stops and then turns to look at El, and now his worry skyrockets again.

"I swear if they hurt-" he starts, but this time Karen speaks up, "Hopper, please relax, it's been a long day already" she gives him a soft look.

And now Hopper is about to be driven mad not knowing what's going on, "Then what the hell is going on!" he all but shouts, demanding an answer.

At this, Joyce pulls Hopper off to the side, away from the others as she moves to whisper into his ear, "Uhm...El got her first period today", and he's pretty sure his heart stops there.

"What?" he sputters looking at one of his oldest friends and Joyce seems to be getting some amusement out of his reaction, she shakes her head, all while shrugging her shoulders, "It was bound to happen sometime soon, Hop".

And he now turns to look at his daughter, who appears to be unsure about something, she eventually makes eye contact with him, and he feels his body slump.

"Holy shit" is all he says while he begins to rub at his head. Karen moves to take Hopper's other arm, "Why don't we fill you in, and El?" she turns to look at the girl who perks up, "Yes?" her voice is quiet.

"Why don't you go say goodbye to the boys" she nods towards the basement steps. Hopper sees her hesitate slightly, but then Max stands and holds her hand out to her. She gives her a warm smile, "Come on El, the boys are probably wondering what happened to us".

El hesitates, but then her lips pull up slightly, taking the other girls hand, and pulls her up and they move towards the basement, disappearing downstairs.

Hopper turns his attention towards the two women who are leading him towards the kitchen. "How about some water, chief?" Karen asks and he only nods as he leans against the kitchen's island.

He hears the woman laugh as Joyce places a hand on his arm, he doesn't look at her. "Don't worry Hop, we filled the girl in on everything".

He whips his head towards her a lightning speed, his eyes widening, "Everything?" he questions and Joyce nods just as Karen places a cup of water before him.

His hand grasps the cool cup, but he doesn't drink.

"Yes, we figured three woman would be better to explain things like periods, puberty, how boys and girls are different and...sex" she shrugs at the last bit.

His face pales and he begins to feel nauseous.

"I'm not ready for this" he collapses his head into both of his hands sighing heavily.

Joyce chuckles, "Well, you're going to have to be. Besides, I'm sending her home with all the supplies she needs, but you'll have to buy them next time" she pats his arm.

"Ugh" he groans, "I never knew this is what it would be like having a teenage daughter".

It's Karen's turn to laugh, "Really Hopper? She is a girl, it's to be expected".

Hopper shakes his head, "Yeah but...now I've got a hormonal, telekinetic girl who *also* has a boyfriend" he laments.

Karen scoffs at him, "You know Mike won't hurt him Hop. Besides, Ted and I have had the same talk with him ages ago, plus he's had health class, I'm sure he knows how to be responsible".

He turns to look at her, he can feel a slight irritation growing within him. She doesn't realize how difficult it is for him to accept all this and for him to begin to worry about the possibility of El and Mike taking that next step.

He feels like she doesn't realize that if they make a mistake, it's El, who's going to suffer.

She seems to pick up on this and rolls her eyes at him, "Hopper, I promise you we'll have rules here as well, besides, they're young, I really don't think we have anything to worry about for awhile," she said gently.

He wants to believe her, but he's scared and he's not really sure what

to say. But, the look of reassurance Karen gives him helps a little bit. So, with a heavy sigh, he simply nods, and says "Okay".

Mileven POV

Mike's pretty sure that he's close to losing it. Not being able to truly focus on one of his favorite movies of all time. His leg shakes anxiously, bouncing here and there as he tries to calm himself.

Night has finally settled over Hawkins, and he still hasn't seen El since she disappeared with Max hours ago.

I hope she's okay... the thought drifts through his mind.

He had only heard through health class and the awful videos the school made them watch what a period was like for a girl. But, he had a feeling it was much different than what he actually believed.

Truthfully, he just wanted to make El feel better, to let her know that he was there for her.

He let out a hefty sigh. Wishing that El would just come and see him.

And, as if on cue, he heard the basement door open, and down came Max, followed closely by El. As soon as she looked up, their eyes met, and Mike sat up straighter in his seat.

When they reached the last stair, the girls looked around at the boys, who all remained motionless.

A weird awkwardness hung about them, and Mike watched as El shrunk back, her face turning a light shade of red.

And that's when he knew he had to do something. So, he quickly jumped to his feet and moved towards the girls. He gave Max a look, and she merely rolled her eyes as she side stepped out of his way.

El turns her head just enough for their eyes to meet again, and a smile pulls at his lips.

"Hey" he says, trying to decrease the awkwardness. "Hi" she shifts on

her feet.

He can see her lips turning upwards, and he can sense her mood shifting.

A dramatic huff comes from the nearby redhead, "Oh my gosh you guys, seriously?!" she starts as she gestures to the boys still sitting uncomfortably in their seats.

Max places her hands on her hips and glares at them, "Honestly, how are you guys ever going to have girlfriends if you're freaked out by a period, grow up" she tosses her hair over her shoulder.

Mike watches as his friends exchange embarrassed looks as they stand to their feet and approach them.

"Sorry El" Will whispers, as Lucas and Dustin nod in return.

"Yeah, we aren't used to...girl things" Dustin stutters.

"You mean girls in general?" Max teases, lifting an eyebrow in the boys direction.

They give her an incredulous look as El steps forward, "It's okay, I understand" her voice is soft and sweet, and Mike knows it's genuine.

"Hopper's here, so El's got to go" Max reminds the girl beside her, Mike frowns.

"But...we barely got to spend time with you" he says sadly, and the girl moves towards him, "I know, I'm sorry" she ducks her head, and Mike immediately reaches out to take her hand, "Hey, there's absolutely nothing to be sorry for, I just wish we could have spent more time together" he looks at her deeply and she smiles slowly.

"Well, guess that's out cue to leave" Dustin says patting Mike on the back, startling the dark haired boy, who gapes at him. The others snicker as they move past Mike and El, who stand their, with their hands intertwined as the rest of the party amble up the stairs.

Mike huffs as he watches his friends disappear and El squeezes his hand, returning his attention to her.

He softens, "How are you feeling?" are the next words out of his mouth.

El blushes slightly, raising her shoulders, "It's...weird" she scrunches her face, which he silently loves.

"And...a lot of information" she stresses. Mike nods his head, and a question pops into his mind, "Uhm, what *did* the girls talk to you about?" he winces slightly.

El shrugs her shoulders again, "Everything. Puberty, how boys and girls are different, periods and...how babies are made" and at this she looks directly at him, and his eyes widen.

So, *she knows*, his mind trails and he can't help but feel a bit flushed. He swallows hard, "Yeah, it's kind of weird...right?" he tries to remain calm about it, but his heart is beating a million beats per second.

El gives a soft laugh, "Maybe, but-" and at this she shifts lightly, so that she moves closer to him, "Not with the right person," her voice is barely above a whisper as she guides her hands up and around his neck.

He's pretty sure he's forgotten how to breath, '*Did she just-*', his mind begins to wander, but it doesn't get very far because before he knows what's happening, El's mouth finds his, and it shuts his entire thought process down. His hands find her hips as he returns the pressure.

The kiss is delicate and tentative. Their lips grazed each other in a gentle dance, slow, but a deeper meaning behind it.

It's something Mike has never experienced before, and as El pulls him closer, he begins to feel a second meaning behind the kiss. '*Someday*', it's almost as if her sweet voice caresses his brain. He melts deeper into the embrace, hoping to relay the same message to her.

And as much as he would have loved for the kiss to continue, El breaks away slowly, but doesn't pull away.

Their eyes open, and their gazes meet. El nuzzles her nose with his, a knowing smile dancing across her face. And he's never felt more excited and thrilled in his entire life.

She giggles lightly as she tugs at his hand, "Come on, I don't want Hopper hunting us down" she teases.

And like a moth drawn to a flame, he follows. He will *always* follow her.

Hopper's POV

With one more pat on his shoulder from Karen, he hears a stampede of feet trample up the stairs. The adults all turn to look to see all the kids make their way upstairs.

However, he quickly notices that two particular teens are missing. The kids are chatting idly as they begin to collect their jackets as they get ready to head off.

He approaches the teens, "Hey, you're missing two" he states and all of them turn to look at him.

Lucas gives him a coy smile, "Oh, Mike and El?" he says nudging Dustin beside him who's trying to not laugh, but the toothless boy adds, "Yeah, they're just saying good-bye" and at this they all start snickering.

Hopper's eyes widen at the realization as he begins to push the teens aside, "Wheel-!" he begins to growl, but he's stopped forcefully by a hand grabbing onto his arm. He whips around to see Joyce's tiny body trying to stop him. "Hopper! Calm down" she said slowly.

He gives her wild eyes, he wants to go down and pummel the teen who is involved with his daughter.

He's about to speak, but another clambering of steps are heard coming up the stairs. His head whips to the two, who are slightly red faced as they come out of the basement door.

They startle when they catch Hopper's look.

"What?" El asks innocently and the other teens laugh, while Hopper relaxes.

"Nothing" he growls as he pulls his arm out from Joyce's grasp, "Get your things, we need to head out" he grumbles as El nods and moves to wrap each of her friends in a tight hug.

"Sorry we didn't finish the movies" she says looking at them with guilt, as Hopper stands back shaking his head.

"It's okay El, besides we can do it again next week" Will reassures her with a bright smile, which she returns.

He watches as she gives one last look to Mike, who seems somewhat shy of approaching her. But, he sees the determined look on her face as she gracefully moves towards the boy and envelops him a hug, as she wraps her arms around his neck.

Mike hesitates slightly, but he gives in. Securing his lanky arms around the girl.

"Night Mike" she says, pulling away slowly. "Night El" he whispers, and just as he begins to pull away, El smirks a mischievous smile as she moves quickly and places a quick kiss on the boys lips.

The teens snicker about as Karen gives a muffled squeal.

Hopper *really* wants to smack the grin that's forming on the boys face straight off. But, El bounces past her friends, and grabs onto Hopper's arms, tugging him towards the door.

"Where's the fire?" he asks, and El only shakes her head, "Ready to go, don't want you to kill Mike" she flashes a toothy grin up at him, and Hopper all but rolls his eyes as he follows the teens outside the door.

Just as they step onto the steps, El cranes her head back around waving, Hopper turns to see Karen, Joyce, Will and Mike standing on the doorstep, waving back.

"Thank you for *everything* today!" El croons, and both Joyce and Karen smile brightly, "You're welcome sweetie, you're more than welcome to come over *anytime!*" Karen chirps back.

"Yes, goodnight El, let us know if you ever need anything!" Joyce calls.

"Night El!" Will calls.

"See you later, El!" Mike cheers, waving frantically which makes El giggle.

"Night everyone!" she throws one last shout over her shoulder just as they arrive at the blazer.

They both step into the old rig. Shutting the doors, as Hopper brings the beast to life.

It's silent for a bit, and there's so much Hopper wants to say, but he's not sure how to.

But, it seems that El reads his mind as she turns towards him, she reaches out and takes his hand that's resting on the console between them. She smiles, and doesn't say a word.

And, it's all he needs to know that she's okay, and that she trusts him.

He flashes her a smile, hurumphing as he turns his eyes forward, focusing on the road.

He lets out a heavy sigh, knowing even though things will be changing, and he knows it won't all be easy. Seeing the way the teens and other moms flourished over El, he knew he wouldn't be in it alone.

Phew! That was another long one! But, I'm soooo excited I got it done a week before Stranger Things 3, AHHHHH! Still cannot wait, they keep releasing these adorable pictures of Mileven and...I just can't even!

I seriously cannot wait to finally see their relationship come together! I just hope the Duffer brothers don't tease us and dramatically break them up or something. I HATE it when shows do that! But, I also don't think they would do that knowing the fan base.

Anyways, I really enjoyed writing this chapter it was a lot of fun! And I hope you all enjoyed it too! I'm going to wait until the next season is out to update, so please give me time!

I binged watched the second season in one day, with impatience to watch El get back together with the party (Mike), but I feel like I missed so much. So, I made my husband promise me that we weren't allowed to watch more than 3 episodes a night.

So, as always PLEASE REVIEW and let me know what you thought about this chapter, it's honestly one of my favorites! And I can't wait to have new material to play with!

Thanks again for reading and the reviews again from the last chapter! You are all wonderful!

13. Author's Note Please Read

SPOILERS FOR SEASON 3

Alright so, if you havent finished season 3 yet please dont read just yet.

Soooooooo, loved the new season, but my heart literally broke with the last 15 minutes. They did exactly what I hate. They put Mike and El together for about 1 epsiode, which was awesome! Then tore them apart for 2! But then they did have some really sweet and cute moments with the later episodes, which was super sweet. But then El moves away! Like...WTH! Gah!

Not just that but it literally threw a wrench in my story, sigh*

So, my wonderful readers, I'm going to need some time to process this a bit and try to figure out what to do next. I was honestly hoping for a sweet ending like season 2 but alas, no. Now I'm debating which way to go and honestly I'd love some input.

Alright, so option #1 is I could go totally AU and pretend the last 15 min of episode 8 didn't happen. Hopper is still alive and Joyce stays.

Or, option #2, I could play around with what happened and possibly go into what happened. Because, did Hopper really die? But, like i said my heart broke watching El leave and Mike and her going into a long distance relationship, like the Duffer brothers better fix this!

But, I needed to rant a moment and I wanted to see what you guys thought.

Anyways, give me some time for this next chapter and I hope to hear from you!

Thank you all!

14. Movie Night Fright

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE, read my little blurb here before reading!

Honestly, all I can say is WOW! I cannot believe the amount of responses I received from my author's question, and I can't say how touched I am for all your wonderful inputs and rants as well. It was nice to see that so many of us were really affected by what played out during season 3, especially with our favorite Mileven couple. Truthfully, I think we all needed a rant session! Lol!

But, thanks to all of your feedback, and through some of my own pondering as well, I was able to take a step back and really examine where I want to go with this story. As of right now timewise, I'm towards the end of March 1985. So, I haven't even gotten to Season 3 just yet. But, even saying that, I think I found a storyline I could really work with.

Truthfully, I was planning on going canon with this story. And I actually spent a good chunk of time developing a storyline. But, then I realized I think I really need to go AU because that is what this story originally followed. It sucks that Season 3 went a different direction, but I do plan on incorporating it in, just obviously changing some aspects. Maybe down the road I will do another story that takes place during the 3 month period after the incident and go from there, but I've learned to try to focus on one story at a time.

So, this story will be AU, and again, it will take me a bit to even get to season 3's timeline. And again I will be changing it for my needs of this story.

Thank you ALL again for your reviews, your insights and rants that helped me take a breath and accept what happened in season 3, and to know that I wasn't alone in feeling this way.

So, as always, please enjoy!

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things!

Chapter 14: First Scary Movie

Hopper's POV

It doesn't take him long to realize that having a teenage daughter wasn't going to be all peaches and cream as he had hoped it would be. Especially when his sweet Sarah was little, she was the easiestly the happiest kid he could have asked for. She was sweet, full of energy and didn't seem to have a mean bone in her body. Granted, he sadly remembers, his first daughter never had the chance to grow up. She never experienced what growing up meant, which, for Hopper, he never saw what having a teenage daughter entailed.

When he first adopted El, he knew it would be a bit more challenging. Not only with the whole telekinesis and all, but, it was like she was a toddler and teenager rolled into one. He had to teach her about reading, writing and appropriate social skills, however, that didn't mean she still wasn't a teenager.

For, the one thing he forgot in adopting this special girl, was that a particular boy also came tied next to her. He also seemed to vaguely forget that girls come with their own set of rules. In the back of his mind, he knew that El would eventually become a woman, but he never expected it so soon. Not when she now had a boyfriend added to the mix as well.

After bringing her home from the Wheeler's home, he had to admit that he was nervous. Obviously being married and having been with multiple females, he knew about periods. But, for him to now be living with a young girl experiencing this part of life for the first time, he wasn't sure if he'd survive.

It had all started out...okay. However, El's painful cramps and moodiness only increased. He made sure that she was stocked up on pain pills and that the hot water bottle was never far from her reach. But, it seemed that it wasn't enough for the young girl.

Day two of her period, all she did was stayed rolled up in a ball on the couch, eating and watching television. By the third day, if

Hopper's breathing had been too loud for her liking, she was just about ready to bite his head off. He didn't know what else to do to make sure she was comfortable, and if he said the wrong thing, she would begin to tear up, and he'd have to start apologizing profusely.

By day four, he was exhausted, and didn't want to get out of bed, fearing the wrath of El. Today was different though, he had to go to work since it was a Monday, and he silently cheered in relief. But, another part of him wasn't sure about leaving her alone all day.

He grumbled to himself as he dressed for work, hoping to not wake El from her sleep, knowing that the last couple of nights had been filled with restlessness for her.

He tiptoed out into the kitchen. Peering over to the side, he could see that El's door was still closed and he let out a long breath in relief. Hopper moved around the kitchen as stealthily as possible, hoping that he wouldn't wake the girl.

Just as he was putting on his hat and getting ready to head out the door, believing he was home free, a shrill ring cut through the cabin.

Hopper's eyes widened as his head whipped over to the cursed phone that rang out against the cabin. He raced over to the phone in record time and just about ripped the receiver from the wall.

"Hello?" he half growled half whispered into the mouthpiece. The line was silent for a moment before a voice trickled through, "Uh..hi Hopper", it was Mike, and if Hopper could, he would have reached through the phone and strangled the kid.

"What do you want, kid!?" he hissed, glancing a look at El's door and seeing that it still remained closed.

"Oh, uhm...I was just wondering if...the party could come over today?" he asked hesitantly and Hopper let out a long breath. He squeezed the receiver tightly between his hands, feeling the plastic bend, "It's Monday" he said slowly, "You kids got school".

"Actually...we have today off. It's a vacation week for us...sir" he throws in at the end and Hopper scoffs. "Then why are you calling so

damn early!?" he growls, and he can hear Mike take a breath in from the other end.

"Because I know you leave early...and I guess I wanted to make sure it was okay to come over?" Hopper can hear the hesitance in the boys voice. He groans as he rubbed a hand over his face, resting it against his beard.

On one hand, he's glad that Mike has asked first before coming over, on the other he's annoyed, and that's mostly that '*just because*' feeling that he now has for the boy who is his daughter's boyfriend.

He ponders for a moment before speaking, "How many are coming?" he finally asks. "All of us, we've got nothing going on today and we figured El would like the company", Mike responds.

Hopper huffs, he doesn't have a super long day today, and would rather not come home to a house full of teenagers. But, it would mean El would have some companionship and he's more accepting that she won't be alone in the cabin with just Mike. So, with a huff he speaks back, "Fine, whatever kid. But just know she's been pretty tired...and a little moody" he rolls his eyes.

He can hear the light chuckle in Mike's voice as he speaks, "Don't worry Hopper, I've got an older sister, and Max is pretty intense as well".

Hopper nods, "Alright, but don't say I didn't warn you".

"It's okay Hop, we're heading over in an hour or so" Mike states.

"Sounds good. El's still sleeping, but I'll leave her a note and don't forget the rules and the secret knock" he reminds the boy a bit more forcefully.

"Yes, we won't go anywhere", Mike mumbles. "Okay" and with that Hopper doesn't even say 'bye' as he hangs up the phone, needing to get to work, but not before scribbling out a quick note to El.

He sets it on the kitchen counter in plain sight knowing that it will be difficult for El to miss when she finally wakes up. With one last glance around the cabin he moves towards the door and heads off to

work.

Mileven POV

She *really* hates being a girl more than anything ever since her first period reared its ugly head. El never knew this was something in her life that she would have to live with for many years to come.

After having the long winded conversation about puberty and everything that entailed as she grew, El could feel herself getting overwhelmed by all the information that had been explained to her. And she wasn't very happy in learning that this nauseating pain was something she would have to deal with *every* month.

When Hopper first brought her home she found herself curled up in a ball, not wanting to move because she honestly felt disgusting and riddled with pain. Hopper tried to comfort her, but it seemed like just his mere presence was annoying, and she didn't know why.

Of course Karen and the other woman had explained she might have some moodiness, however, she never expected to feel so annoyed. She found herself crying more often, especially after snapping at Hopper and feeling guilty for it. El couldn't wait for this ordeal to be over with.

Finally though, after a handful of days of learning how to cope with this new 'life experience' she found her cramps weren't as painful, but she was still very tired. So, it was actually no surprise for her when she didn't hear Hopper leave for the morning, which is her usual wake-up call.

Instead, her growling stomach awoke her. El could feel the low grumble in her stomach as she blinked away the sleep that was heavy in her eyes. She rolled over in her bed trying to ignore her stomach, but the growl quickly became more prevalent. So, with a huff, she pulled herself from her warm sheets, stretching her arms out wide and letting out a long yawn.

She ruffled her still growing hair, which was slowly becoming a lot less curly and more wavy as it began to grow past her shoulders. El

shuffled out into the cabin and glanced at the nearby clock, "Seven, three, zero" she whispered to herself. She knew Hopper was already gone for the day.

El moved towards the kitchen, but stopped short when she noticed a note set on the counter top. She grasped at the note quickly and sounded out the words, mouthing them to herself, *'El, off to work. Your friends will be over around 8, I guess. See you after work -Hop'*.

Even though she was just beginning to grasp a better understanding of speaking, reading was still a bit more of a struggle for her. But, after sounding it out, a wide smile pulled against her face, realizing that her friends would be coming over, and shortly.

So, with lightning speed she ran back to her bedroom and changed out of her pajamas. She pulled on a pair of baggy corduroys a simple blue shirt, and then topped it off with a warm sweater. She then combed her hair, just as Hopper had taught her, and was able to get it somewhat under control.

Once she was satisfied, she bounded out into the kitchen and fetched her daily breakfast of a couple eggos, which she placed in the toaster and waited for them to cook.

Just as the eggos were finished, and El began to place them onto an old chipped plate, she felt a familiar pull in her stomach. Even though she knew she was hungry, she had begun to distinguish hunger pains with the dreaded period cramps. Bending over and clenching her teeth together as the cramp twinges in her stomach, El waited for it to pass.

After the ache finally began to dull, El let out a frustrated breath, grabbing her eggos and made her way to the kitchen table. Slathering her eggos in syrup, she began to dig in to her favorite treat, awaiting for her friends to make an appearance.

As she finished up her breakfast El cast her eyes over to the clock and read, 7:52, she smiled, knowing her friends wouldn't be far off. El cleaned up her plate and bounded over to the window, her eyes scanning the forest.

Thankfully, even though during the early stages of winter in Hawkins that had brought more snow than usual, spring was finally making its presence known. The snow was beginning to thin, and the air is becoming crisper and had a whisper of warmth behind it.

El smiled seeing the snow melt away. It wasn't her most favorite thing in the world, especially since she had spent long weeks by herself trying to keep warm before Hopper had found her. She was excited for summer, and time with her friends. El closed her eyes and began to think of all the fun things she and her friends would be able to do together.

Just as she began to drift off slightly, a knock on the old wooden door startled her from her daydreams. She sucked in a breath, as she glanced out the window to see all of her friends were bundled up, standing outside on the porch.

She could just hear her friends not so quietly bickering from the other side. Bounding excitedly from her spot, she all but raced to the door. Her ears picking up the familiar sequence of knocking. Before the person on the other side could finish, El flicked the locks open with her powers, and whipped the door open. She was met with quick gasps all around, as her eyes landed on the group of people standing outside.

They all startled slightly, but her eyes grew wide seeing all of her friends standing there. But, her amber eyes settled on a particular dark haired boy who stood, with his mouth slightly opened, his hand still hovering where the door once was.

"El!" he says surprised, a warm smile growing on his face as he took a step into the warmer cabin. It didn't take her long to jump forward towards the boy and wrap him in a warm hug. "Mike!" she squealed as she buried her face into his neck, taking a deep breath and enveloping his scent into her nose. She hummed in contentment as they settled into one another.

Honestly, she could have stayed there for hours, forever even if it meant Mike was in her grasp. But, a clearing of the throat broke them apart from their hug, "Uh, guys we're here too", Dustin's lispy voice stated as the rest of the party walked in.

Both Mike and El give him pointed stares as they still remained close to one another. El moving her hand to wrap around Mike's ever growing one's.

He looks down at her, "You look nice today" he gives her a soft look, and El can feel her cheeks warm at his compliment. "Thank you" she returns softly as she tucks into his side. As he wraps an arm around her, keeping her close.

"Alright, if you two wanted time to yourself, you could have just not invited us to come, Mike" Lucas teases them as he hangs up his and Max's coat.

Mike scoffs, "What? I can't say 'hi' to my girlfriend?" he bites back. And El can't ignore the thrill that goes up her back when Mike says that to her.

"It's nice to see all of you, I'm glad you were able to come" El finally acknowledges the rest of her friends who have shed their heavy coats and now move about the living room, finding places to sit.

"Yeah, we haven't been here in awhile, we always manage to get stuck in Mike's basement" Dustin teases, while Mike throws him another glare.

El hides her giggle as Mike leads her over to the free spot on the couch, him sitting between herself and Dustin.

"So, what should we do?" Max questions as she rocks back and forth in Hopper's worn lazy boy. The rest of them look around, shrugging lightly.

Will perks up, "What about D and D, we haven't played in *forever*", he stresses, eagerly looking about the group.

"But, El and Max don't have characters" Lucas points out.

"Oh, right" Will says sadly, hanging his head.

Mike speaks up beside El, "Don't worry, we will create them soon. I don't have my manual with me, but the next time El comes over, I'll make sure to put her mage character together" he turns and smiles at

the girl beside him. El can't help but beam at him.

"Uh, what about me?" Max questions. Mike scoffs, "Lucas can help you" his voice snarky and Max merely rolls her eyes at him. "Besides, there's no 'Zoomer' character, you'd have to be a rogue or something" Mike continues to explain.

Max groans, "Whatever, I'd only play if I was super bored or something" she throws her head back, her red hair fanning out on the chair as she stares up at the ceiling.

Mike shakes his head at her. And El can feel the animosity between the two. She casts a glance back over to the girl. Even though the two of them have made amends, she still hasn't created a strong bond with the only other female in the group. And now El wonders if she ever will.

Before she can think too much on the matter, Mike speaks up again. "I did bring over the Star Wars movies, we never finished them this weekend, we could try again?" he questions.

Lucas groans at this, "We just watched them" he drones. The other boys turn to him with surprised looks.

"Dude. It's *Star Wars!*" Dustin says flabbergasted. Leaning closer to the dark skinned boy.

"But that's just it. We've seen them a million times, and we *just* watched them three days ago" he argues back, raising his hands and flapping them back down towards his side.

"But, Max and El never got to finish them" Will defends looking between both girls.

Max looks back up from her seat, "Honestly, I don't really care" she picks up a piece of her hair and twirls it aimlessly between her fingers.

El feels a shift next to her and she flicks her eyes up at Mike who is looking at her, "Do you want to watch the movies?" he asks her gently.

She can see the hopefulness behind her boyfriend's eyes, waiting for her to answer. And she knows what she wants to say because she *really* did want to watch the rest of the movies, and the fact that Mike adored them, only made her want to watch them more.

She opens her mouth to speak, but then Lucas voice cuts through the cabin, "Hey!" he says as all eyes fall on him as he reaches over to the pile of movies that are haphazardly stacked in teetering piles. He carefully maneuvers one of the tapes from the pile and holds it up, his teeth flashing.

"El, you've got A Nightmare on Elm Street?!" he exclaims looking between her and the movie.

El looks at the dark tape box. She shrugs, "Hopper brings home a lot of movies. But he usually lets me choose what to watch" she begins to explain.

After getting a good look at the box again, she recognizes it faintly. Remembering the day Hopper had brought home a bag's worth of movies. It had surprised El as to how Hopper had actually seemed quite excited about the hoard of movies. Both of them had pawed through the endless tapes, with enthusiasm.

She had stumbled upon this particular one, but set it aside, shivering slightly at the scared girl with some kind of bladed hand hovering over her. She had been through enough traumatic experiences and just looking at this case told her it would not be a fun movie to watch. So, she had never seen it before, and was surprised by Lucas's reaction.

And the second Lucas had raised the movie box up to the group of teens, Max all but catapulted out of her seat, quickly snatching the tape from Lucas's hand. "What! How did you even get this El? It's rated R!" the fiery redhead's mouth was turned up into a brimming smile.

El shook her head, "Hop brought home a bunch of movies, that was one of them".

"Guys, we *have* to watch this!" Max said eagerly.

Dustin nodded, "Yeah, when's the next time a classic R rated film is just going to be in our grasp, and no adult around to say no".

El froze slightly in her seat. She was surprised as to how eager her group of friends were at the discovery of this particular movie. Now she was slightly doubting herself before about setting the movie aside so quickly.

Mike seemed to have noticed her quietness and he bent his face closer to hers. A concerned look crossed his face, "Hey" he said gently, their eyes searching each others. "We don't have to watch that movie if you want, it's your day El, you can decide" his voice is gentle, and it matches the grip in which he now holds her hand.

El sees the uncertainty written across Mike's face. And she slowly turns her head to see that the rest of the teens now stand grouped around Max, looking over the back of the tape, their eyes scanning the description.

She can see the excitement in her friends faces, and she wants to make them happy too. Them being here, Mike especially, is more than enough for her, so she feels like she owes them.

"So, can we watch it?" Max's eager voice pulls Mike and El away from one another. She feels Mike's hand grips hers harder, "Guys I don't think-" he starts to defend her, but she cuts him off with a quick "Yes".

Mike looks back at her quickly, and she bows her head slightly, not wanting anyone to see the uncertainty she knows is written across her face.

"El" Mike says softly, and she knows he can feel her apprehension, he always can for some reason. But, she tries to shake it off. She turns her head up, and plasters the best smile she can on her face and gives him a slight look, "I'll be okay," she says. And Mike softens.

"You sure?" he asks one more time, his eyes scanning every inch of her face, trying to see any reservation. But, El holds her face firm and nods, "Yes", she starts and turns back towards her friends, nodding, "We can watch the movie". And at this the other boys and Max

'whoop' in excitement as they hustle around the living room, getting things set for the movie.

She turns back towards Mike, who still looks skeptical, "Help me make popcorn?" she asks, trying to ease the poor boy.

He lets out a long sigh, but nods, returning her soft smile with his own. "Yeah, that sounds good" he states, as he moves to stand, holding out a hand for her to take as he pulled her up alongside him.

Mike guides them to the kitchen where they both poke around the kitchen, trying to find the stash of popcorn, and the airpopper.

El takes a moment as she searches through the cabinets, to practice her breathing. She can feel the anxiety within her begin to mount, but she doesn't want it to show. She just hopes the movie will be over quickly, and she won't have to think about it again.

He's not sure if El is being upfront with him about how she *really* feels about watching the impending scary movie. He's not even sure if she knows what the horror film is about.

He desperately tries to see past her facade, scanning her face with his eyes. But, either she's telling the truth, or just holding back really well. He believes the latter, but he agrees to help her with getting some popcorn ready, as they head towards the kitchen.

Mike pokes through the taller cabinets, and on his third attempt, he finally discovers an old air popper. He silently thanks his height advantage as he barely stands on his tiptoes and reaches up to the highest shelf and grabs onto the greasy contraption.

He sighs as he pulls it down, turning back towards El, who is rummaging through another cabinet. "Got the popcorn maker" he states, setting it down on the nearby counter. El turns smiling happily as she holds up an unopened bag of popcorn kernels, "Got the popcorn".

Mike can't help but chuckle as they move together to get the machine ready. El watches with eager eyes as Mike explains to her how the air

popper works. For, El states firmly that she has no idea how it works, Hopper making the treat each and every time before a movie. Mike smiles at this, always eager to show El how things work, so he measures out a cup of popcorn and has El pour it in.

He then grabs a nearby bowl, and sets it underneath the mouth of the machine. "Okay" he starts as he plugs in the popper and flicks the switch to 'on'. "So, it'll take a second to get going, but the kernel's will begin to pop, and they'll spit out here", he points to the mouth of the popper.

El nods at his explanation, her face now going to full concentration as they both leaned against the counter with their elbows, waiting for the popcorn to appear.

They watch in silence as the machine hums and rattles. Both of their eyes locked on the machine, when the first kernel pops up and into the bowl. El jumps back slightly but giggles as another one appears.

Mike can't help but watch the girl beside him, as she marvels at the machine before her, which is now quickly spitting out popcorn as the bowl begins to fill. There's something about the newness of everything she witnesses that never gets old to him.

The way her eyes brighten, the way her face turns into surprise, and the way her mouth turns up into a brilliant smile, it's all Mike can do to not pull her right flush against him. To experience that newness with her, hoping holding her close will flow the excitement right into him.

He feels his mouth pull at the corner, and he knows he's staring at her. She finally realizes it and turns towards him. Their eyes meeting once again, their faces only a breath away.

Mike feels his heart flutter in his chest, realizing how perfect this girl beside him is. He sees her face flush, "Why are you staring at me?" she asks almost teasingly.

He lets out a breath of air from his nose, ducking his head only for a second, only to look back into her amber eyes, "Because you're beautiful. And I can't help but watch you" he says softly.

He's actually a little surprised as to how easily the words flow from him, but in truth, he wants her to know just how much she means to him. And she deserves to know.

El's mouth turns into an 'O' and he watches as her cheeks reddened even more. It's her turn to duck her head now, but only for a moment, moving her head back up to gaze into his eyes. A wide smile dancing on her lips, she's even closer now.

"You're too sweet" is all she says and Mike can begin to feel that indescribable pull, so he doesn't ignore it. His eyes flick to her lips, and he sees hers do the same. They move towards one another slowly, and seconds later, their lips meet in an embrace.

Mike shifts so that he stands closer to the girl, both still leaning on the counter as they meld their lips together. It's soft and sweet, a deep meaning behind it. He could have stayed there forever if it weren't for his obnoxious friends.

"Ew guys really?! Over the popcorn!" Lucas exclaims, which promptly pulls El and Mike away from each other, their faces flushing about a million shades of red of being caught. All of their friends knowing eyes are on them now.

"Uh" is all Mike can utter at being caught, but he hears his girlfriend giggling beside him, as she stands up, pushing her elbows off the counter.

"We'll be over in a minute" she waves a hand at their friends who all roll their eyes and turn back to whatever they were doing.

El turns back towards him, and places a gentle hand on Mike's chest, he's pretty sure he forgets how to breathe. Even more so when El looks up at him with a coy look playing on her face. "Thank you for showing me how this works" her voice is gentle, as she tangles her hand into his shirt, bunching it within her fist.

The look she's giving him and the way her hand is against his chest causes his breath to catch in his throat, as his words slip over his tongue, "Uh..uh-huh" is all his stupid mouth is able to spit out, and he cringes, closing his eyes tightly, wishing to disappear. But, El's giggle

allows him to peak open his eyes to see her gazing up at him with dancing eyes.

He relaxes slightly, letting out a breath, before he tries again, "Your welcome El. I love showing you new things".

El tilts her head at this, her face still full of joy, a smile dancing on her lips. "Butter?" is her next innocent question and Mike nods, "Of course". And he slowly moves away from the girl, who is causing a lot of new feelings and emotions to stir within him.

So, when he begins to rummage through the fridge in search for butter, he allows this chance to get himself to calm down, and stop his rising hormones.

"You okay in there?" El's voice is just behind him, lingering with teasingness. Mike sucks in a deep breath as he does finally find the butter dish and snatches it. He pivots on his feet and turns towards El, gesturing towards the butter, "Alright, just need to get it melted. Want to get some smaller bowls?" he asks her.

El gives a small nod as she moves to grab a bunch of smaller bowls from a nearby cabinet, as Mike melts the butter in the microwave.

He and El come together once again. Her with multiple filled bowls of popcorn, and he with the melted butter, which he dribbles heavily over each bowl. He can't help but smile at the girl beside him, in which she returns at the comfortableness of the situation.

He hopes this type of encounter is something that will become a norm to them. His heart loving the way they meld together so easily.

Once the butter is depleted, he and El both grab the multiple bowls of popcorn and hand them out to their friends, who eagerly begin to chow down.

Mike moves to the furthest corner of the couch that is already occupied by Max and Lucas, and after El gives her last bowl to Dustin, who's reclining in Hopper's chair, she gives him a shy look as she approaches the couch. He smiles at her eagerly, patting the spot beside him. And with four people on the couch, it does become a

tight fit.

El tucks her legs up underneath her and sits facing him, their shoulders flush up against one another. It warms Mike to his core.

Will stands from the old rocking chair he occupied and moves towards the t.v. He bends down, and then looks at his friends with an eager expression, "Everybody ready?" he asks. And everyone cheers as Will presses the play button, and quickly moves back to his seat.

Max, Lucas and Dustin had spent their time covering the living room windows with heavier blankets, casting the light out. So, the cabin was overwhelmingly dark for the middle of the day, causing the t.v to be the only source of light.

The movie comes to life, of course the multiple previews flicker across the scene as Mike settles into the couch, steadying the bowl of popcorn on his lap. He moves his head towards El, "Popcorn?" he whispers to her.

He watches as she jumps slightly, causing concern to already stir within him, but she quickly recovers and smiles at him through the light of the t.v. She grabs a handful and hums when the food hits her tongue. She nods at him, "Good popcorn", and they both smile as they turn back towards the movie.

The movie finally begins, an eerie music following along. Mike brings another handful of popcorn into his mouth. Chewing it thoroughly as the opening plays out. He casts a half glance to El, to try to gauge how she is doing. And he's relieved to see her normal relaxed face that is illuminated by the dark t.v.

The creepiness of the movie starts right off the bat. Especially when the unsettling breathing followed by the assemblance of Freddy's clawed hand. Even though Mike had never seen the movie himself, he knew the basis of it.

He knew he was drawn towards it immediately when his hand, which had been eagerly stuffing his mouth with popcorn, comes to a quick stop, freezing over the bowl, his eyes fixated on the screen before him.

It doesn't take long for each of his friends to be seen jumping from their seats as the movie plays out. And it seems with each more frightening scene, El tucks herself closer, and closer to him. And he holds her tighter and tighter.

It's when Tina's second dream sequence begins, is where the movie truly comes to life.

A resounding gasp comes across the dark cabin when Tina is first slashed by Freddy. And it's when she begins to become a bloody mess as she's tossed about the room, that Mike begins to inwardly cringe.

"Holy shit!" Dustin's voice breaks the silence in the room, when Tina's body limply falls to the ground on the t.v screen.

Mike takes this moment to notice his own shallow breath and how around the room, his friends are either watching the movie with wide, frantic eyes, hiding slightly behind their hands or knees. Or are turned away, only peeking open their eyes to see if the grotesque scene has ended. The only one who seemed drawn to the movie was, Max, although this didn't surprise him.

He carefully turns his head downwards to check in on El, who has now practically crawled into his lap and rests her head tightly against his chest. He can see that her eyes are tightly closed, refusing to watch the scene. He bends his down to her and whispers "Hey", which causes her to jump and grip him tighter.

Her wide, frightened eyes meet his, he looks at her delicately, "El, hey if you're scared we don't-" he tries as he brushes a stray strand of sweaty hair from her face, but she shakes her head, "No, I'm okay, just don't like the blood" she says, timidly turning her head back towards the t.v.

Mike can sense her hesitation and he huffed to himself, wishing that the girl would be upfront about how she *really* felt about this horror film. But, he chooses to ignore it, and continues to hold her tightly to him in support.

She doesn't understand why *anyone* would want to watch this movie.

From the moment it started, she silently wished for it to be over.

It hadn't started as scary as she thought it would be, but she found her notion very, very wrong. It didn't take long for the frightening figure of Freddy to make an appearance. It was the traumatic dream sequences that caused El to furiously bury herself closer to Mike, using him like a safety blanket. Blocking her from the events that were flashing across the screen

What was even worse was the amount of blood that seemed to transpire throughout the entire movie. She could barely watch the scene where Glen was horrifically sucked into his bed and a fountain of blood spewed everywhere. El couldn't help but let out a loud shriek as she buried her head deep into Mike's chest.

Her breathing became quicker as she felt Mike's arms wrap her even closer to his chest. Her warm breath rebounded against Mike's shirt, causing sweat to begin to form on her face. Mike shook her slightly, "El" he whispered, willing her to look up at him. But, the gasps of her friends as the movie continued to play made it so she didn't want to look anywhere but at bold green stripe across Mike's chest.

"El" Mike whispers a bit more worriedly, but El still can't bring herself to look up. She feels Mike sigh as her head follows his quick inhale and exhale. She feels him shift, as he slowly pushes her away from him.

This frightens El as she shakes her head, "No" she tries to push the boy back down but Mike takes a hold of her shoulders and eventually guides her off of him. El silently can't believe that Mike seems to be mad at her and pushing her away. But, then she notices that Mike is removing his old blue sweatshirt as he cascades it around her head, blocking the television from her sight.

She finally lifts her head up to meet the worried eyes of her boyfriend, "Come on" he whispers as he moves to stand to his feet, pulling her alongside him. She follows obediently, as she cringes as the movie's sounds behind her elisate screams from her friends. It sends her right into Mike's arms as he continues to guide her.

"It's okay" he says soothingly as he pulls her away from the living

room. She doesn't know where he is guiding her, her eyes being blocked by his sweatshirt and the darkness around them hindering their sight.

But, she trusts Mike, as he continues to shuffle her around the cabin. He soon stops and removes himself from her, she immediately misses the contact and goes to say something, but her eyes squint as Mike flicks on a light, she hears a door shut behind him. She then realizes that she's in her room, and she lets out a long breath.

Mike approaches her with a look, and she struggles to meet his eyes. "El", he voice is soft and full of worry as he places both of his hands on her shoulders.

She still doesn't meet his gaze. He huffs slightly, "I wish you would have told me that you were scared".

El shrugs lightly, Mike's arms following her movements. She finally peeks her brown eyes up at her boyfriend, and their gazes meet, she watches him soften as his lips pull upward. He rubs her shoulders, and the gesture is enough to make her feel warm.

"I'm sorry" is all she's able to squeak out, and Mike's face falls "Don't be sorry El, there's some movies out there that are pretty scary", he tries to reassure her. But, she shakes her head, her somewhat sweaty hair sticking to the side of her face. She turns away from Mike's embrace and pulls the blanket tighter around herself.

She can feel the tears prickling at the corner of her eyes, and she desperately tries to control them. With a quick intake of breath she speaks, "It's just-" she starts, and she can hear the warble in her voice. She swallows hard before continuing, "I don't want to be scared of something like that".

Mike doesn't make a peep behind her, as she turns her head just slightly over her shoulder, "I've- we've been through worse, so why is this scary?" she forces out her voice, squeezing her eyes tightly closed, and now her tears flowed freely down her cheeks. Mike is there in a heartbeat, turning her to face him, and wrapping her in a tight hug.

His face rests gently against her head as she revels in the comfort that is just Mike, as she buries herself deep within his chest.

She allows herself to cry, allowing all of her pent up emotions to escape in that one moment, and Mike just holds onto her, making her fully aware that he's not going anywhere, and for that El is grateful.

After a couple of minutes, El feels the tightness that was bundled up in her chest release, and she falls deeper into Mike's embrace. Sniffling, El turns her head upwards, as Mike pulls back just enough for their faces to be just a breath away.

Mike sighs, "El, you're right, you've been through *so much*," he stresses, as he pushes away her stray hairs. El sniffs again, listening to the boys words. "That's why it's okay to be scared of something like the movie, I mean-" and at this a small smile pulls at his mouth, "I think I'd be a little worried if the movie *didn't* scare you", and at this El can't help the grin too.

Mike moves his head and rested it against El's forehead. Both closing their eyes at the feeling of just being close to one another.

El feels Mike's hold tighten, "Just because you've saved us and the world on multiple occasions doesn't mean you have to be brave all the time. That you can't be scared" he continues and El listens to his every word.

"I mean-" he starts and he pulls away slightly, and El can see his eyes sparkling, "I've been scared a million times before" his voice strains, and El cocks her head slightly, a silent asking to what he means.

And at this, Mike huffs again, "When...when I saw you disappear when you fought the demogorgon, I..." and at this he stops, his head shaking, he squeezes her arms tighter, "I was *so* scared" now it's his turn for his voice to warble, and El's pretty sure she feels her heart break slightly.

"And, I didn't know where you were. I didn't know if you were alive or-" and he falters on his next words. He takes in a steadying breath, "Anyways, for three hundred and fifty three days I was scared", his deep dark eyes are now staring straight into hers, and El can feel the

emotions behind his gaze.

"For almost an entire year I was scared I'd never see you again, and I didn't know if that was something I would have *ever* gotten over if you didn't come back that night".

El can feel her eyes welling once again at Mike's words, it's her turn to give his arms a tight squeeze, a semblance that she understands.

Mike laughs lightly, "I'm pretty sure I would have gone insane not seeing you again, you mean too much to me for me to not be scared when you're not around" he says gently.

"Mike" El finally speaks, her voice tender, unbelieving that a boy who found her in the woods cared so deeply for her, it made her heart sing. She raises a hand to place it gently on his cheek and he melts into her touch.

"Thank you" is all she says, and Mike smiles down at her, "Anytime" he says. And they stay there like that, enveloped in one another arms, the feeling of safety surrounding them, and El bends to the feeling.

After a couple of moments, Mike breaks the silence, "Do you want to go back out there or-?" he begins to question but before he can even finish El shakes her head, "No...no" she says firmly and Mike chuckles lightly. "That's fine, it was kind of freaking me out too" he admits with a shrug.

El flicks her eyes towards her closed bedroom door, "What about the others?" she asks, turning to look back at Mike. He casts a hand in the direction of her door, "They barely even noticed that we left, I'm sure they'll find us soon enough". El smiles at this.

"What do you want to do?" Mike then asks. El shrugs, taking in her room, but her eyes come to rest on her bookshelf, she smiles eagerly running out of Mike's embrace and moving towards her stack of books.

Her eyes greedily scan the shelf, when it finally falls on one that Hopper has yet to read with her. She pulls the book from its resting place and turns back towards Mike, smiling brightly. She simply

hands him the book and his eyes scan it quickly, "Alice in Wonderland?" he asks, a smile matching her own. She nods simply.

"Hopper and I haven't read it yet, he says it's a little complicated", she deepens her voice to match her dad's voice. Mike chuckles at this, "This is one of my little sisters favorites, it's just a little weird, but we can definitely read it together".

El smiles widens even more so, as she grabs onto her boyfriend's hand and drags him over to her bedside, she clambors onto the bed tucking herself next to the wall and headboard, her legs cast out in front of her. When Mike hesitates slightly, she rolls her eyes and pats the vacant seat beside her.

"Uh-" is all Mike is able to say, and El huffs giving him a look, "You've sat on my bed before" she states.

"I know, I just...what if Hopper sees?" he asks worriedly. El shrugs, "We'll be up before he gets home" she states matter of factly. And El watches as Mike continues to ponder this for a moment, but he eventually untenses his shoulders and climbs up on the bed beside her.

He settles into the pillow behind his back, and since El's bed is only a twin, she moves so that her head rests gently onto Mike's shoulder, her knees curling up onto his lap, and she feels him tense slightly, but it only lasts for a moment as he holds the book up before them, and he rests his head against hers.

"Alright, how about I start, with the first couple of pages, and then you can give it a go?" he looks down at the girl beside her. She shifts and smiles up at him nodding, "Sounds good" she says sweetly, and she watches as Mike doesn't turn back to the book, but she sees his eyes flicked down to her mouth and then back up to her eyes. She knows exactly what he's thinking, and before he can even react, she pushes herself up, and connects her lips with his.

She can tell she's startled him, but he quickly melts into their familiar rhythm. Their lips part and link back together in a slow dance that is only there's. The kisses they exchange becoming more and more expansive each time they are given a chance to practice, and El feels

a shiver run down her spine each time their lips meet.

Eventually, they do slowly separate from one another, a soft sigh escaping from each of their mouths, as Mike nuzzles El's nose, causing her to giggle. "That was nice" his voice a lower octave than usual.

"Yes, it was" El agrees as the two of them bask in their moment together for a beat longer. Mike does eventually turn to the book, and he begins to read, El relaxing back into his shoulder, zoning in on Mike's deeper voice, as it lulls her.

He takes some breaks, allowing El to read a page here and there, Mike praising her each and every time. They even sneak in a few kisses here and there, each time leaving a tint of pink on each of their faces. El's not sure how long they stay there, but both of them eventually drift off to sleep, both secure in each other's arms.

Hopper's POV

His windshield wipers shriek each time they pass over his rain streaked windshield. The cool spring rain coming down heavily. He can't help but wince slightly at the annoying noise, he clenches his teeth as his shoulders tense tightly up to his ears.

It had been a *long* day, he had a lot of paperwork to catch up on that Flo had been badgering him about for weeks, and she wouldn't let him leave until he was caught up. Of course, that had taken him three hours longer than usual. So, when his clock in his office finally read eight o'clock, he gathered his things and made a straight shot towards the door.

He sighed heavily for having lost track of time. He *really* didn't like leaving El in the cabin for too long alone, but his voice in the back of his head had reminded him that her friends were over, so she should be okay. However, he silently hoped that the group of adolescents had already cleared out so that he didn't have to listen to them.

He knew they would probably be annoying him to no end to come over throughout the week, since it being a break and all, '*especially*

Mike', his persistent dad brain whispered to him.

Shaking his head he tried to clear himself of those thoughts as he focused on getting home through the rain storm. He pulled up a ways away from the cabin, and turned his cruiser off. He could just make out the kids bike's that leaned neatly against the cabin's porch.

He let out a heavy sigh, rubbing his tired face, knowing he would be shooin' the kids out the door the moment he walked in. Grumbling to himself, he made his way towards the cabin, his steps lightened by the wet ground.

As he reached the door he bypassed his normal rule of making sure he used the secret knock, knowing that all the kids were safe and sound behind the cabin door. So, with a set of old keys that he hardly ever used, he began to work at the locks and quickly threw the door open, a loud, 'smack!' echoed through the cabin as the door made contact with the nearby wall.

What Hopper wasn't expecting was for the cabin to be completely enveloped in darkness, except for the glowing television that was playing some sort of movie. And he was even less prepared for his heart to jump into his chest when he was met with an assortment of screams when the front door hit the nearby wall.

"Jesus!" Hopper jumped, holding a hand up to his pounding heart. He could barely make out the figures in the dark, so he haphazardly searched out the nearby light switch on the wall. When his hand found it, he flicked it on quickly, and he was met with numerous squinting eyes as the teens took in the bright light.

They all groaned in unison, but Hopper's quickly beating heart didn't stop him from raising his voice, "What the hell are you kids doing?" he looked at all of them as they looked between them.

There was a resounduoul "Uhhh" from around the room, and Hopper glared between each of them, waiting for a response. When no one did, he looked to the t.v. and saw that some kind of horror movie flickered across the screen. Hopper scowled as he moved across the room and sought out the coffee table, where numerous empty VHS boxes sat.

He picked up the closest one, he shook his head, holding it up for the teens to see, "A Nightmare on Elm Street?!" he barked, bending down to pick up the next one, "Halloween?! These are 'R' rated films, where did you kids find these?!" he threw the cases onto the table, all the teens flinching in return.

"Uhm...there yours" Will offered weekly, Hopper could see that he was trying to sink away into his seat.

"What?!" Hopper growled at them, and at this Dustin stood. He moved towards his and El's collection of movies, Dustin patted the pile, "El said that you brought home a bunch of them, they just happened to be in there" he shrugged.

Hopper had neglected to take a close look at the films he had been able to nab at a rummage sale. El had pawed through them at the same time, maybe she had set them aside and he never noticed. He inwardly sighed, knowing this was partially his fault, however, he knows that the kids know better than to watch films like these.

A scream behind him, caused him to turn to look at the television screen that flickers behind him. He watched as some poor lady was being chased through the streets, he bent down quickly and flicked the t.v. off.

He then turns, folding his arms in front of him scowling at the kids. "You kids know better than to watch films like that. Especially with El?" he stresses.

Max shrugs, "She said she wanted to watch them" she says a bit annoyed, and Hopper narrows his eyes at her. "I don't care, you all know what she's been through, you should think a bit more, I'm sure she's scared out of-" but he stops short, just realizing that through his blind rage that El's missing, scratch that, El *and* Mike are missing.

Hopper's pretty sure his heart just about catapults out of his throat at this realization, "Where are El and Mike!?" he all but yells at the teens who eyes widened in fright as they look around.

"We..we...we don't know, I thought they were still here" Dustin cowers away from him. This doesn't help Hopper's predicament, as he

scans the cabin quickly, and his eyes settled on El's room, her door closed.

He just about knocks Lucas out of his recliner as he barrels towards the door, his hand resting on the doorknob as he effortlessly yanks it open, just about ripping the door off its hinges, "You better have a good reason-!" he begins to yell into the room, but stops short when his eyes settled on Mike and El, who are curled up on his daughter's bed.

El's head rests gently on Mike's chest, as her right arm drapes over the boys stomach. Mike's wild hair cascades around El's head as he looks mighty uncomfortable with how his neck is bent. He has his right arm draped around El's shoulder, holding onto her tightly, while she is curled up into his side. Hopper can see 'Alice in Wonderland' opened and resting on Mike's stomach, the book rising and falling with each of Mike's breaths. Neither waking with his loud outburst.

The dad monster inside him roars in anger, as he lets out a hot stream of air from his nostrils. He wants to reach in there and pull the kids apart and toss Mike out into the cold winter night. He feels his body flinch, moving to do so, but instead, his body freezes taking in the sight. It's been a long while since he's seen El sleep so peacefully. Most of the nights she's tossing and turning because of a nightmare, and most recently because of the newfound pains she's been experiencing in becoming a woman.

Hopper feels movement beside him as the rest of the teens pile beside him. "Huh, looks like El didn't like the movie after all" Dustin comments through Hopper's arms, as the other's nod in agreement. Hopper growls batting the kids away.

He lets out a long breath as a liberal debate courses through his head, '*should he wake them...or....*'. He's truly not sure what to do, but a stirring from the bed causes his attention to go directly there.

El shifts as she blinks her eyes, bleary from sleep. Her shuffling causes Mike's head to flinch as he nods awake as well. El looks straight ahead as she rises up, her light brown eyes meet Hopper's, and she freezes. Mike moves his arm, barely awake, as it searches for El.

"El?" he says with a heavy voice, and without turning away from Hopper's eyes, El shakes Mike awake.

"Uh, Mike" she says and Hopper finally watches as the boy sits up straighter, moving a fist to his eye, rubbing away the sleep. He yawns and finally turns to see what El is gazing at, and the second the boys dark eyes find Hopper's, he's awake and trying to jump out of the bed as if someone lit it on fire.

"Hopper!" he springs away from the bed, and El follows behind. "We, uhm...we were just.." Mike falters looking between the man towering before him, and his just as befuddled girlfriend.

El nods her head, trying to agree with Mike's unspoken words, "Yeah dad, uhm..we were...reading" she says looking up at him, as Hopper folds his arms over his chest.

"Reading", Hopper repeats back and both teens nod furiously. "Yeah, El wanted to read Alice in Wonderland, so I read some, and then she read and then we..." he trails off and El finishes for him, "Fell asleep", she says guiltily as she shuffles where she stands.

A pregnant silence falls over the room. Mike and El stand apart, waiting for Hopper to respond. They cast unsteady looks in his direction every couple of seconds, waiting for the reaming to begin.

Hopper wants to yell and scream at them, but he can see that they are both clothed, and had no blankets covering them. He can see their tired eyes and can only believe that what they say is true.

So, with a huff Hopper lowers his arms. "Thought you were watching a movie with your friends" is what he starts with. Both El and Mike look at each other with curious looks. El's the first to look back at him, "We were but..." she looks down, ashamed.

Mike moves confidently and takes a hold of her hand, their eyes meeting, "But, El got scared, so I took her in here to read, so that she didn't have to watch the movie" Mike explains not even glancing at Hopper.

"Yeah, didn't like the Freddy guy" she says her voice tight. "Mike

pulled me away so I didn't have to watch it anymore, and he offered to read" El states, looking directly at the older man.

Hopper nods slowly, "Okay, and...you just fell asleep?" he quirked an eyebrow at the teens and they nod fiercely.

"Mike was reading and then I would read for a bit, and...I guess we just dozed off" El shrugs her shoulders, her face of genuine concern.

Hopper can tell that the teens *are* being truthful for the most part. But, his gut still swirls with uncertainty. He lets out another heavy sigh, as he looks at the teens, "Look" he begins, running a hand through his slicked back hair. "I get that you were helping El out, which I appreciate," he nods to Mike, "But this whole...thing-" he gestures to them and then the bed, "I'm not sure how I feel about it" he says truthfully as the teens tighten their shoulders.

"I know-" he starts feeling at a loss as to where to go with this, but he tries to power through, "It's just...I get that things are going to change with you two" he says looking between the teens, who stand idle listening to his words.

"And, I get that Joyce, Karen and the other girls filled you in on things, but...you've got to understand where I get nervous," he states, as he watches the teens face reddened at this, but they both nod in agreement.

He approaches them slowly, "Look, I'll let it slide, *this time*", he growls looking between the two of them. "But, think from now on, there's going to be some ground rules, *especially*, when Mike's over" he gives the boy a firm look, and Hopper can see that Mike doesn't particularly like this.

"For now though, you kids need to get going" he gestures to Mike and then points out El's open bedroom door.

"It's raining pretty heavily out there" and at this El slumps, hating to see her friends leave. Hopper stands aside to let Mike and El exit into the living room, where their friend's sit huddled on the couch, eyeing them wearily.

Hopper stands before all of them, "Time for you kids to get going. I'll bring you back home since it's raining pretty hard, but!" he holds up a finger as the teens began to move to grab their things, he then points to the stack of movies, "No more 'R' rated films, you hear me, or *no one*, will be allowed at this cabin, you hear me?" he growls and all the teens nodded in unison.

It's still pouring outside as the teens scramble to grab their bikes and stuff them into Hopper's cruiser. El, of course tags along in her red slicker, cozying up to Mike in the front seat. Hopper rolls his eyes as he watches them, bringing his cruiser to life as he makes his way through Hawkins.

Of course, Mike's house is last on their stop, and El jumps out to help him with his bike. Hopper can barely make out their figures in the rain, but she sees El move to wrap Mike in a tight hug, in which he returns.

She then moves to stand on her tiptoes and Hopper's stomach growls as he watches them kiss for a couple of moments, not a care in the world that they are getting drenched by the rain that cascades around them.

And, after what feels like a century to Hopper, the teens finally break apart, no doubt sporting wide smiles as they wave each other off.

El approaches his vehicle and yells out, "Night Mike!" one last time, before shutting her door. El removes her red hood and turns to him. Hopper gives her a look and she rolls her eyes at him as she buckles herself in.

"What?" she gave him an annoyed look and Hopper scoffs at her teenage attitude as he roars his engine to life once again. "Oh, don't you give me that, like I said, there's going to be some rules for you and Mike for now on" he says firmly.

El huffs at this, "Like what?" she groans, turning to look at him, her arms crossed, almost like a challenge. He can't help but flash her a teasing smile, "Ever heard of the 'three inch minimum rule'?"

Alrighty, finally got that chapter done. Sorry it took so long, life

honestly got super hectic for me and I just didn't have time to write. Also, I had a bit of writer's block as well because like I said earlier, I had intentions of making this fic canon, but then decided to go AU instead. Also, it's been awhile since I've seen some of the old '80 horror movies, and I rewrote that scene three times because Halloween and Friday the Thirteenth were really not that scary. But, A Nightmare on Elm Street actually came out on VHS in January of 1985, so...it worked.

I kind of needed a bit of a transition chapter as well, and now hopefully I can begin to merge more into the storyline I'd like to go with. I have a lot of ideas for Season 3 and beyond and I can't wait to get there!

Let me know what you guys think, and hopefully I'll be posting another chapter soon!

As always, PLEASE REVIEW! I love hearing from you all!

15. A Day At The Cabin

Thank you, thank you, thank you, as always for all of your wonderful and sweet reviews! I truly cannot get enough of them! Also, I know I said I wasn't going to be writing another story while I worked on this one, but honestly, I kind of just had to get Anima out there for a bit. There's something about fantasy writing that's just a bit different than sticking with the original universe. But, between getting some motivation and some very sweet reviewers I have been puttering away at this chapter for awhile now, so I hope you enjoy!

Thank you for your patience as well!

Disclaimer: I own nothing.

Hopper's POV:

The boards beneath his feet groaned alive as he puttered out onto the porch that was shaded by the overhang. A loud yawn escaped his mouth as he sat down onto the rickety swing that creaked with his new weight.

Sighing loudly, his eyes carefully gazed about the quiet morning forest before him. The sun was just peeking through the dense trees that had finally shaken the final remnants of winter from their tired limbs. Now, small buds danced across each branch, readying themselves for the longer and warmer days of spring that finally teased the air.

A warming breeze swept across his hands as he brought his steaming mug of coffee to his bristly face, humming contently at the contents as they graced his tongue.

It was morning's like these that Hopper always enjoyed, especially being out in the forest. Sure, when he lived in his trailer that was nestled next to the peaceful lake he had mornings fairly similar to this one, but there was still the traffic of neighbors and those who choose to head out early for some fishing. He never knew when he would receive true privacy there. However, being in a remote area of

the woods, it was something he got every single day.

But, he realized that this type of privacy wouldn't last long either, for, he had *finally* been given the okay from the real estate agent he had been tirelessly working with for months now in closing on the home he had his eye on. Of course, there were other bidders interested in the home, but Hopper had worked close hand with the local real estate agent to make sure it was his bid that went through.

He had only gotten the confirmation a couple days ago, and he was still letting the information set in for himself. He hadn't told El, because he wanted to make sure all the t's were crossed and i's were dotted just to be sure nothing happened.

So, Hopper allowed this moment of peace and quiet as he settled into the swing even further. And what was even more thrilling to the old police chief was the fact that it was finally Saturday, his day off. One that he was so eagerly looking forward to since he had been working so much overtime lately.

So, he was selfishly enjoying the morning to himself, his eyes slowly shutting as he sat back in the swing and allowed the object to sway him into rare serenity.

That is, until the door to the cabin creaked open. Hopper peaked his right eye open just a bit and saw that El, who was already dressed for the day, was standing eyeing him curiously.

"Hi, dad" she said sweetly as she padded her way over to him.

Even though Hopper was enjoying the peaceful morning to himself, he couldn't find himself the least bit mad as El made her way over to him, moving to sit on the spare seat beside him.

A smile pulls at his face.

"Hey, morning' kid, it's early, I'm surprised to see you up so early," he chuckles a bit to the girl who kicks her feet allowing the swing to move forward.

She gives him a look as her ever growing hair swings about her head. "What do you mean?" she asks and Hopper's a bit taken aback.

"Uh, I just mean it's the weekend, you usually sleep in" he shrugs his shoulders.

El nods at him, "Yes, it's the weekend which means-" and before El can finish her sentence a yell echoes across the trees.

"Hey, good morning!" Hopper whips his head so quickly, he's pretty sure he gives himself whiplash. His eyes settle onto an approaching figure, tall, lanky, dark unruly hair, pushing his bike with one hand and waving excitedly with the other.

Hopper groans as he watches Mike make his way past the trip wire, as El springs from the swing and runs to meet the boy.

"Mike!" she cries as she jumps from the top step and lands with bare feet on the leaf covered ground as Mike lays his bike up against his usual tree.

No sooner does he take his hands off the bike does El barrel into his open arms, both giggling at the contact.

Mike rocks her steadily as El rests her head against Mike's chest and he lays his head gently down against hers.

Hopper glares at the two's contact, especially as they break away to give each other enough distance to look into each other's eyes, it doesn't take long for their mouths to find one another.

He's pretty sure his eyes roll all the way to the back of his head as he tries to not watch their interaction with one another. The monster within him stirs. He's thankful that their kiss is fairly short as they break apart, El intertwines her hand with Mike's as she pulls him towards the cabin, with a brilliant smile and flushed cheeks.

"Hey Hopper", Mike greets him somewhat nervously, El barely allowing him a moment to stop and do so as she yanks the cabin door open.

Hopper merely nods at him as he watches the pair disappear behind the door.

He sighs heavily before yelling out, "Hey, remember, three inches!"

And El's somewhat annoyed voice returns, "I know!"

Growling slightly Hopper hastily finishes off his cup of coffee, ticked that he wasn't able to enjoy the morning like he was hoping to. Completely forgetting that Mike had once again come to him at his office asking if he could just come over Saturday for some time with El.

Hopper was up to his ears in reports as Flo was also trying to talk to him. It had been an excruciatingly long day for him, and Hopper remembers haphazardly agreeing and waving the very eager boy off, not realizing his mistake until he was alone in his cruiser on the way home. Nearly smacking his head off of his steering wheel in frustration.

And now, it was Saturday, his day off, where, he had planned to take it easy, but now he had to play babysitter to his daughter and her boyfriend.

Slumping forward slightly and giving himself enough inertia to hoist himself out of the swing, Hopper walked slowly to the cabin door, pulling it open. He was immediately met with loud music cascading from El's room, and he happily noted that the door was open slightly ajar.

This had become a very regular occurrence between the two. It wasn't often that Hopper allowed the two of them time alone, but he realized he would never hear the end of it from either of them if he didn't allow them to it every once in awhile.

So, with a quick peek into El's room, seeing that the two are talking excitedly over some kind of movie Mike brought over, Hopper moves into the kitchen to rinse out his coffee mug. He sets the washed instrument on the nearby strainer, as he walks to the living room to sit in his recliner.

He groans as he sits back, the chair rocking steadily. He leaned the chair back just so, his eyes cast to the right as he is able to look into El's room.

A loud, obnoxious song is playing from the boombox Mike had gifted

her about a month ago. He watches as Mike begins to mouth the words to the song as he stands slowly all while El giggles. Mike then reaches for the girls hands, pulling her up and twirling her about, their laughter rings out over the music. Hopper rolls his eyes at the two as he turns his attention back to whatever the local channels has to offer.

The music sifts through the room, surrounding the two of them in a blanket of the most popular songs that Mike had recorded from the radio.

She can't help but feel entranced by the beat of each song that plays from her electric yellow boombox Mike had gifted her.

It was something she greatly treasured.

Sure, Hopper had allowed her to play with his record player, and had pawed through his collection of records. It was something that kept her seemingly occupied on her long days alone. But, she found that his older music style wasn't necessarily *her* taste. And when Mike and the others began introducing her to the new iconic hits of their generation, she gravitated towards the fresher beats.

She immensely enjoyed the moments that just Mike was able to come over. It was her favorite past time to pull him into her room and pop in a new cassette tape that he usually brought her.

It didn't take Mike long upon entering her room to fish around in his tattered bag and hold up a new cassette for her. El squealed in delight as she snatched the tape from her boyfriends hand and placed it into the boombox, pressing play almost immediately as she and Mike settled onto her bed, allowing the music to fill the small room.

"What do you think?" Mike asks as the unfamiliar tune hit her ears.

It started slow, but a rhythmic beat picked up before a man began to sing about a girl.

She turns to look at the boy beside her smiling widely, "It's good!"

Mike nods, "This is 'Jessie's Girl' by Rick Springfield, I waited awhile

for the radio to play this one again, but I thought you'd like it".

El hums as she continues to listen to the new song, and she can't help but rock her head along to the beat.

Just then she hears another voice joined in, she's surprised to see Mike singing along lowly to the music, and for some reason it entrances her.

She listens for a moment to Mike's steady, low voice, and after a couple seconds he turns to look at her and he stops.

El shakes her head, "No, don't stop!" she smiles eagerly.

"What no...sorry, I listened to it a couple times and now it's stuck in my head" Mike chuckles as his cheeks flare a bit.

She gives him a look, "But you're really good" she cooed.

Mike's eyebrows raise up disappearing behind his mop of black curls, "Really?" his voice sounding uncertain.

El nods eagerly, "Yes, keep going!" she grabbed ahold of his arm and shakes him lightly.

Mike laughs again, but when he looks at her, he gives her a deep look before taking a deep breath and falls in line with the next part of the chorus, "*I play along with the charade, there doesn't seem to be a reason to change, you know, I feel so dirty when they start talking cute*" and at this he begins to rise slowly to his feet.

El begins to feel giddy as she listens to the boy serenade her, he holds out a hand and she takes it, giggling the entire time as he pulled her up.

Mike continues to sing to her, as he spins her about, "*I wanna tell her that I love her, but the point is probably moot, cause she's watching him with those eyes*" and at this Mike spins her into him and places a small kiss on her cheek, and El swells at the feeling, and the words that he speaks to her. She knows he's just going along with the song, but the way his dark eyes never leave hers, she feels like he means every word of them.

But, she pushes that information to side for now, and instead enjoys her boyfriend's low voice singing to her, as they dance around goofily to the song.

"And she's loving him with that body, I just know it, and he's holding her in his arms late, late at night...you know, I wish that I had Jessie's girl, I wish that I had Jessie's girl, where can I find a woman like that?" Mike continues to swing them around her very small room, and it doesn't take her much to break out into a fit of giggles, in which Mike follows suit.

They're both overcome with laughter that they fall into each other, and Mike wraps his arms tightly around her as she buries her head into his chest. As they try to hold each other up as their bodies wrack with laughter.

Mike goes to turn them, but his knees brush up against her bed and he topples backwards bringing El with him, she lets out a startled shriek as they topple onto her bed.

Mike's arms are still tightly wrapped around her, so El can only peek her head up slightly, and she sees Mike is peering down at her.

Their eyes meet and laughter envelops them once again as Rick Springfield's voice fades into the background.

El can feel Mike's deep laughter against her chest, and she becomes very aware as to how close they are.

Her laughter fades as she looks back up to her boyfriend, who's laughter is dying out as well, El realizes that their faces are a mere breath away.

She casts him a warm smile, "Hi" she whispers as she shifts slightly, pulling her hands up from Mike's grip as she rests them on his chest.

His throat bobs as he swallows, he returns her shy smile, "Hi" he says, and El melts at how his voice has deepened throughout their time of knowing each other.

It only takes her a split second for her to decide that they are *really* close to one another, she can feel their hot breath against one

another's cheeks, and she doesn't want their to be a separation anymore.

So with a quick shift, she raises her hands and grips them behind her boyfriend's head as she pulls him quickly to her, their lips meet in a sweet embrace.

It doesn't take Mike long to respond as she feels his timid hands gripping her hips tighter as their mouths move together in a long embrace.

A soft mewl escapes her mouth and Mike shudders against her. She officially decides in that moment that she *very* much enjoys this position for kissing. She moves once again, scooting her hips up Mike's body.

And even though she's expecting them to continue, Mike pulls away quickly at her motion. A small gasp leaves his mouth.

She gives him a confused look, "What's wrong?" she questions.

Mike's then shaking his head as he begins to shift, pushing his longer body up, bringing El with him. Since he was below her, he moves to sit on the bed, while El stands to her feet, standing between the boys legs.

"Mike?" she presses a bit more firmly, but Mike just gives her a lopsided grin as he intertwines both of their hands together.

"Nothing's wrong El" his voice is a soft whisper. He then glances around her, and El follows his gaze.

She turns back to him with a raised brow.

He sighed, pulling on her arms and tugging their faces closer together, "I just didn't want Hopper catching us like that, is all" he shrugs.

El pulls back slightly and then moves to sit next to Mike on her bed, the mattress bouncing at her weight.

"Why?" she asks casually.

She watches as Mike's face begins to turn red as his eyes shift uncertainty.

"Uh", is all he's able to croak out.

But El doesn't relent, "Mike" she croons, hating it when people don't explain things to her because it might be uncomfortable.

He huffs looking at her with pleading eyes, silently asking her to not have him explain.

So, she pulls out the big guns, "Friends don't lie" she tilts her head and gives him a winning smile.

Mike groans at her words, but he finally looks at her, "It's...it's just that we were kind of...in an *intimate* position" he tries to explain.

"Intimate?" El repeats the word.

Mike nods, "Yeah, remember that talk you had with the girls?"

El moves her head in understanding.

"Well" Mike sighs once again, "With how we were just laying, it could be seen as intimate like..." and he trails off his eyes fluttering, trying to decide on his next words.

But, it then strikes El and she smiles broadly in understanding, "Oh! Like we were going to have sex!"

Mike's mouth falls open and his face develops into an even deeper shade of red, "Shhh, El, don't say that so loud!" he says in a hushed voice as he looks over to her slightly opened door.

"Why?" she asks again, very perplexed by everything that was going on.

Mike looks back at her with an exhausted look, he squeezes her hands, "El, remember how the girls explained...sex" he lowers his voice at the word bringing El closer to him as if he was telling her a deep dark secret.

"It's supposed to be talked about between the two people who do it, you know...privacy" he gives her a deep look and El nods at this.

"Yes, but we're close, we're boyfriend and girlfriend" she gestures between the two of them.

Mike lets out an exasperated noise, "Yes, we totally are, and yes, sex is something that boyfriends and girlfriends do but...we're still too young for that" he stresses.

El nods "Too young" she smiles in agreement, and a relieved look crosses Mike's features.

"But" she starts and Mike's mouth turns into a frown. "Why can't we lie down and kiss?"

"Because...because if someone, like Hopper" Mike points to the door, "Sees us doing something like that, he could get mad because-"

"Because it looks like sex" El smiles feeling as if though she's finally understood what Mike was saying.

And even though Mike looks like he wants to argue, El watches his mouth turn into a half grin as he nods slowly, "Yes, because it looks like sex" he agrees, and then stops a bit, a quirk of a smile dancing on his lips, "Maybe...in time...when we're alone we can...kiss, like that" he shrugs sheepishly.

El raises a surprised eyebrow to her boyfriend, surprised he would even suggest something like that. But, the way his irises are deep and dark, filled with something she can't quite put her finger on, she realizes that he *was* enjoying their kissing.

A smile tugged at her lips as she leans forward, and Mike meets her in the middle as they rest their foreheads against one another, rubbing their noses affectionately against one another.

"I'd like that" El whispers, catching his surprised gaze just moments before she swoops in and locks her mouth with his. Both sighing at the contact.

He surprises himself when he gets lost into the first song that plays the tune throughout El's room. Even though it's not one of *his* favorite songs and sees it more as a song that attracts females, he can't argue that it's quite catchy.

He's even more surprised when El catches him singing the song, word for word and goads him into continuing to sing.

Mike can't say no to his favorite person, so, against his better judgement, he continues singing the song, and pulls El to her feet.

He's really enjoying the way they swing about her tiny room as he serenades her. His eyes dance with hers as he tries to convey the words as if they are meant just for her.

Even though he knows it's still a bit too soon to utter *those* words, he can't help himself in showing the girl how much he cares for her. So, he spins her, pulling her close and sings what he believes to be in an off key tone. But if El cares, she doesn't show it.

However, it's when they both find themselves in a laughing fit and stumbling around her room as his knees cave against her bed in which they crash down onto, does her realize things have begun to change between the two of them.

He doesn't miss the quick intensity that fills his girlfriends eyes when their laughter subsides and he's blatantly aware that she's lying fully on top of him.

It surprises him when El shifts and reaches for his head and pulls them into a warm kiss, and he immediately melts into it.

There's a familiarity there as they move their lips together in their own waltz. His hands grip tighter against her small waist, and it's when she lets out a soft noise of satisfaction does a shuddering wave cascade down his body.

He knows that it's escalating, he can feel his stupid teenage brain kicking in, but he holds it firm, instead focusing on the smoothness of El's lips against his own.

But, it doesn't last long, not when El shifts herself upwards her pelvis

grinding into his own, and it's like a damn breaks within him, his hormones rushing past his gate of reprieve. And it all begins to head to one area.

The heat pools quickly, and he knows he *has* to stop before something *very* embarrassing happens. He knows she now understands the difference between males and females, but deep down he doesn't want her to think he's some overly hormonal teenage boy that wants just one thing.

So, with all the strength he could muster to pull himself away from this delicious moment he and El are having, in which he wished could continue, he sat himself up, taking El with him.

It's not hard to see the slight annoyance that flashes across her face as she stands, utterly confused. As he tries to calm the pulsing hormones that causes his body to burn.

And to his mortification, she begins to ask him a million questions as to why he stopped.

He really can't wait for the day where they are eventually past all the awkwardness that follows her growing understanding of the world and the people around her.

Of course, he never minds explaining anything to his girlfriend, but he just wished the more embarrassing conversations would get spaced out and not fall so heavily against one another.

"Because...because if someone, like Hopper" Mike points to the door, his heart beating rapidly "Sees us doing something like that, he could get mad because-"

"Because it looks like sex" El smiles at him.

Mike really wants to say something else, to explain more to her, but he sees her eagerness in starting to understand this newness growing between them, so he pulls his mouth into a half smile and nods slowly, "Yes, because it looks like sex" he agrees.

And to his surprise, *maybe it's the hormones*, he thinks to himself, he can't help but add in, "Maybe...in time...when we're alone we

can...kiss, like that" he shrugs sheepishly. Because if it weren't for his own lack of control, he would have happily continued their make out session, not caring if Hopper found them like that.

He watches as El raises a surprised eyebrow to him, a thoughtful look crossing her face. A smile tugged at her lips as she leans forward, and Mike meets her in the middle as they rest their foreheads against one another, rubbing their noses affectionately.

"I'd like that" El whispers, and Mike's pretty sure his heart stops at his words, and before he can say anything, El recaptures his lips with hers, and he allows his mind to go blank and simply enjoy the feeling that is just him and El.

He couldn't help his initial anxiety about the whole situation as the morning drew on. It wasn't an uncommon feeling that stemmed from inside him when Mike and El were left alone in her room.

He should have called it his initial workout day since he spent most of the morning getting up from his recliner and "casually" glancing into El's room as he either made his way into the kitchen to either get a snack he didn't need or into his own room to get nothing of importance.

Each time he peered into the gap, he always prepared his heart for what was to come, or how he was to react to whatever his eyes found.

Thankfully, each time he seemed to peer in, even though the two were too close to one another on her bed in his opinion, they appeared to be behaving themselves.

However, on his upteenth time of standing up and peering into her room, he was actually almost run over by the two who jumped out of her room.

El nearly knocking into him gave him a curious look as Mike stumbled behind her at her quick stop.

"What are you doing?" she asks him with suspicious eyes.

Hopper knew better than to let his daughter have the upper hand, he merely returned the scowl, "I was heading to the kitchen, not that you need to know everything I'm doing".

At this El cocks her head, "Well, that's about the sixth time this morning you've gone into the kitchen" she bites back.

Hopper frowns at her words, "How would you know how many times I've been into the kitchen?"

El rolls her eyes at him, "Because, you're not very subtle when you come to check on Mike and I," she huffs.

This surprises him. He's pretty sure he's been fairly quiet when going to check up on them. It also helped that his recliner went back just far enough that when he leaned back he could look straight into her room as well.

But, right now that doesn't matter to him, what does is how quickly the young girl had picked up on the usual snarky comebacks most teens nowadays throw at their parents, and he's curious as to how the hell she caught on so quickly.

He points a finger directly at her, "Better watch it missy, no more back talk or Mike goes home" he gives her a steely glare as he hikes his thumb over his shoulder towards the door.

El's head twitches slightly at his words, but she just huffs and mutters, "Whatever" as she reaches behind herself and grabs onto Mike's hand and pulls him into the living room, no doubt to watch whatever movie the boy has brought over this time.

Hopper shakes his head after the two of them as he watches Mike set up their lone VHS player to the television. El moving back into the kitchen and throwing Hopper one last look.

He decides to take in a deep breath and let the moment go.

"What are you kids watching this time?" he asks as he pads into the kitchen behind her and leans against the counter.

"Raiders of the Lost Ark" she says flatly as she finds a bag of popcorn

in the cupboard, Hopper having purchasing some quicker bags for himself and El when they watched Magnum P.I together.

She tosses it into their microwave and punches in the numbers. The machine whirs to life as El leans against the opposite counter, crossing her arms over her chest.

Their eyes eventually meet, but El's quickly flash away.

Hopper heaves a heavy sigh as he moves across their very small kitchen and puts his hand around the girls shoulders. She becomes rigid in his embrace.

"Look, kid, I'm sorry if it feels like I'm-" he starts but El cuts him off, "Spying?" she offers him, looking up at him.

Hopper rolls his eyes, "Not *spying* kid, just...checking up is all" he shrugs.

"No funny business" she states easily and it makes Hopper laugh, "Yeah, no funny business" he returns, looking down at the girl who is trying to fight the smile off her face.

"Look, I'll leave you two alone out here when you start your movie, and I'll watch t.v in my own room, but-" and at this he gives the girl a firm look, "If I come out and see that there's any funny business going on then..." and El finishes for him again, "No more Mike".

Hopper nods, "You got it".

And at that the microwave beeps, confirming that the popcorn is finished, El moves from his embrace and gingerly pulls the steaming bag from the machine.

She grabs a bowl and dumps the popcorn in, giving Hopper one last look before she rejoins Mike in the living room.

He lets out a disgruntled sigh as he watches El sit down on the couch, where Mike is already awaiting her, and she practically sits in his lap. Their giggles transpire as El goes to toss a piece of popcorn at Mike, which he tries to catch in his mouth and fails miserably.

They eventually settle down a bit as the music from the movie draws their attention to the screen before them.

Hopper shakes his head at the two as he moves towards his room, leaving his door wide open.

"That's Indiana Jones, one of the greatest treasure hunters in the world!" Mike exaggerates his hands as he's turned towards El who's smiling broadly at him as she chews a handful of popcorn.

She hums appreciatively to the boy as he reaches for more popcorn. "Why treasure?" she asks as she watches the movie flickering before her eyes.

"Because it's worth a lot of money, and you become really famous too" Mike answers her. She nods her head again, trying to understand the interesting movie before her.

Mike and her friends had brought over multiple movies for her to watch over the last couple of months, and most of them she's enjoyed. However, she finds this one a bit more confusing not understanding the complex terms and words she's never heard before like; Egypt or archaeologist, and she doesn't want to spend her entire time asking Mike what's going on.

She knows that Mike would be more than happy to explain the movie to her, he's done it extensively, especially with the Star War films that she finally got to watch. But, there's something about when she can actually follow a movie and sit quietly with Mike, either holding hands or she places her head on his shoulders and they might doze off. Those are some of her favorite moments.

Eventually, she moves the bowl of popcorn and scoots herself closer to the boy she adores, and it doesn't take Mike long to open up his arm and invites her into his side.

She sighed contentedly as she snuggles into his chest, moving her right hand up to settle on his steadily rising and falling chest.

Mike places a gentle kiss on her head, and a warm smile creeps onto

her face.

"The Indiana Jones movies are pretty good, but you can't beat Star Wars. They're actually re-releasing Return of the Jedi later this month, I can't wait for it" Mike breaks the silence with his giddy voice.

"Re-release?" El can't help but ask and Mike looks down at her smiling, "Yeah, all movies get released at the theaters first, then they put them out on VHS so you can watch them at home. But they're putting Return of the Jedi back into theaters for awhile, so it'll be so cool to watch it again!"

"Theaters?" and El can't help but tense slightly, knowing she's going down her similar path of twenty questions, but the questions slip out before she could stop herself.

Mike turns his attention fully on her, "It's this HUGE building that plays all new movies so people can watch them. You buy popcorn, soda and candy and you watch it all together", he then points to the t.v in front of them. "Imagine this little t.v a thousand times bigger!" Mike exclaims raising his hands above his head.

El's eyes widen at the realization of what a theater actually is. "And the sound is wicked cool too, so much better than any television" Mike shrugs.

El then feels her mouth drop to a frown. Mike moves towards her, "Hey, what's wrong?" he asks, taking her hand in his.

She shrugs solemnly.

Mike huffs beside her, "El, friends don't lie". She lifts her head quickly to him, and she sees the glimmer in his eyes and she gives him a half smile.

"I've...i've never been" her voice is soft, and she watches as Mike deflates slightly.

He nods slowly, "I know El. And that totally sucks, but I *promise* you that I will be the first one to take you" he squeezes her hand tightly.

She gazes at him, her eyes fluttering between his eyes and the freckles that surround his face.

"Promise?" she gives him a teasing smirk.

He gives a small half laugh, "Promise" he then nudges his nose with hers as they breath out small puffs of laughter.

El can't help but lean in and give the boy a quick peck on his lips, as she moves to snuggle back up into his embrace, turning their attention back to the movie. As she begins to wonder what seeing a movie in a theater is truly like.

His loud snoring abruptly awakens him as he pulls himself from his fairly deep slumber.

Hopper blinks slowly trying to clear the sleep that somehow overcame him.

He looks to his television that's playing some re-run and then he looks at the clock that read 3:08.

He strokes his face with his dry hand as he lays there for a moment. But, with a sudden remembrance, he springs forward, remembering that he has two kids in the living room with whom he hasn't heard a peep from in quite some time.

As fast as his aging body will let him, his limbs groaning in protest, as he moves to hoist himself out of his bed, Hopper makes his way out to the living room half expecting to find his daughter making out with her boyfriend.

He tries not to seem too obvious as he exits his bedroom and makes his way into the living room.

What he sees is Mike's unruly dark hair, but he doesn't see El's.

Scrunching his eyes he slowly makes his way into the kitchen, craning his neck around.

He breathes a sigh of relief to see that El, even though her head is

resting on Mike's lap, is fast asleep. Mike's right hand rests gently across her body where their hands are intertwined, even as El slumbers. However, his eyes meet Mike's, who is raising an eyebrow up at him.

Hopper nods to him, "She been out for awhile?" he asks quietly.

Mike shrugs, "For a bit I guess, Raiders wasn't a film she was particularly fond of" he gives a half smile.

Hopper nods once again, as he finds himself satisfied with the situation and moves towards the kitchen.

He heads towards the fridge and pulls out a cold beer. He goes to stand and shut the door, and is immediately startled when Mike appears on the other side.

"Jesus kid, you have to sneak around like that?" Hopper grumbles as he holds his free hand to his chest.

Mike looks like he's holding back a chuckle, but his eyes are determined as he opens his mouth to speak, but nothing comes out.

Hopper gives the kid a puzzled look as he leans against the fridge, cracking open his beer and taking a swig.

After swallowing hard he points to the boy, "Got something you want to say?" he questions.

Mike's shoulders rise and fall steadily as he takes in a deep breath as he begins to fiddle with his hands nervously.

"Uh, you see El and I were...talking" he begins, and Hopper nods slowly to him, "Talking? About what?" Hopper intrigues.

"I was telling her about how movies we watch at home actually come out in theaters first, and...she started asking about movie theaters and she got really excited and-" he stops short, his dark eyes meeting Hoppers with a determined gaze.

"Look" he cuts his arm through the air as if he's trying to calm himself and get to the point, "There's a lot of things that El hasn't experienced

yet, and I think taking her to the movies would be a great start to getting her integrated into Hawkins".

Hopper narrows his eyes at him, "You do, do ya?" he says gruffly, and Mike nods wildly.

"Yeah, I mean, if you go at night and it's dark in there, so not many people would see her and-" he continues to ramble and Hopper rolls his eyes in disdain, "Kid, just get to the point" he groans, causing Mike to stop in his place.

Mike lets out a long sigh, "What I want to ask is...can I take El to the movies and...maybe actually, uh...take her out on a...date".

Hoppers eyes widen at the word, 'date'. And he's pretty sure Mike is as white as his pale skin will go.

The dad monster within him begins to stir in his stomach, *really* not liking what the kid is insinuating.

He wants to take *his* daughter, *his* El, out on a date. To some dark movie theater, where he's pretty sure the boy before him knows what usually happens when a boy and a girl go on a date to the theaters. The heat rises within him.

But, before he can speak, Mike jumps back in, "I...I really want to take her out and show her what it's like for couples to actually go out on dates" he begins to explain.

"I've been saving up money for awhile now, so I'd actually like to take her out for dinner somewhere too, if that's okay?" the boy slinks back, silencing himself and allowing him to digest his words.

Hopper frowns giving the kid a once over.

As much as he doesn't like the idea of them going out on their own, let alone a date, his rational mind reminds him, "*You're going to be moving soon, she's going to hopefully be starting school in the fall, social interactions*".

He sighs heavily, taking another pull from his beer as he looks towards the ground shaking his head.

He looks back up to the boy before him, who is fiddling impatiently, awaiting his answer.

"Look, I guess...that would be okay" he starts and Mike's face lights up.

"But" he stops the boy from getting too excited, "You have to run everything by me *first*, for approval, and I'll be bringing you to each place *and* picking you up" he states flatly.

Mike ponders these words, but he eventually nods, "That sounds fair" he breathes out a sigh of relief.

"When would this...date...happen anyways?" Hopper nearly chokes on the word.

"Uh, one of the Star Wars films is getting re-released next weekend, but it'll be out for awhile" he shrugs.

Hopper thinks on this for a moment. He's not really sure if he's ready to start thinking about next weekend as El's first date.

"How about two weeks, gives you time to think out a plan" Hopper offers.

Mike grins at this, "That's good...can I ask El?"

Hopper grits his teeth at this. He doesn't want the girl to get too excited, especially if his nerves decide to get the better of him and he decides to call the whole thing off.

But, he's already said yes to the boy, and he knows if he says no, now he'll never hear the end of it.

So, with a heavy sigh, Hopper points towards the living room, "Go" is all he states, and that's all it takes for Mike to head towards the couch where a still sleeping El lays.

Hopper watches as Mike eagerly approaches the couch, and bends down reaching for El his mouth opening slightly, but then, he freezes.

His curiosity gets the better of him as he watches the boys face turn

up into a small smile. Instead of shaking the girl awake, he goes to move her head gently, which was now propped up on a pillow which Mike must have substituted his lap with when he got up. And shifting her ever so slowly he moves to sit down in his vacated spot, moving El back to his lap.

The girl moves to tuck herself closer to the new source of heat, nuzzling her head into Mike as he places a gentle arm around her, his eyes moving to the t.v that is still on.

Hopper is surprised by the act, and he feels himself soften. A feeling of slight happiness washing over him, relieved that if his daughter were to choose any boy to be with, he's kind of okay with Mike.

So, I actually got this chapter completed, not as long as the others, but wanted it to be set up for Mike and El's first date! I'm sorry I haven't updated in awhile, been focusing on Anima because I got stuck with this story for a bit.

But, a HUGE thank you to those who reached out about how much they enjoy this story and checked in! For those of you who aren't reading Anima because I posted it there, my grandmother was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer, so there's been a lot of ups and downs along with a crazy work schedule and managing home life as well. But, things have calmed down a bit and I had some time to work on this story and Anima as well.

And wasn't yesterday's Stranger Things Day amazing! LOVED the bloopers and I greedily want more!

Thank you for your patience and I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Now I have a good setup for the next one!

So, let me know what you thought of this chapter by leaving a REVIEW, thank you!